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September
2019

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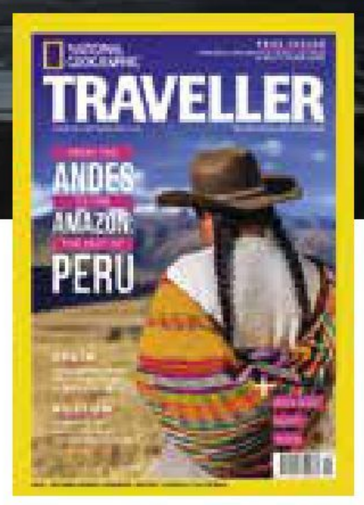
IMAGE: FRANCESCO LASTRUCCI



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Quechua woman, Sacred Valley, Peru
IMAGE: Getty

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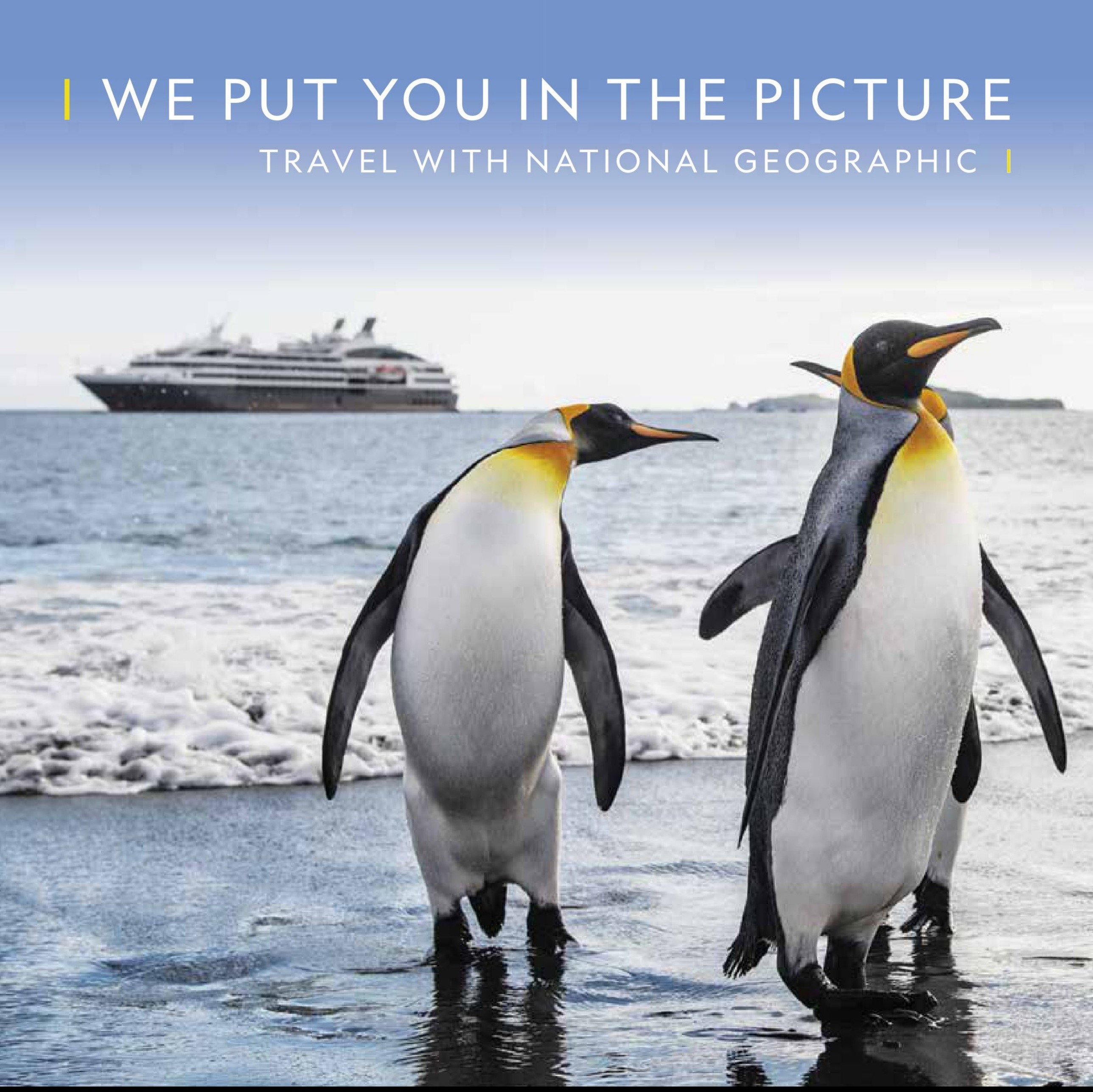

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Sarah Barrell

Is this the UK's most creatively defiant city? With its uniquely home-grown food scene, a newly revamped grande dame theatre and riverside retreat, a hotly anticipated arts hotel, and new photography centre, 'Brizzle' is singing to its own tune. **BRISTOL P.65**

Emma Thomson

Egypt — the very name conjures legends in the mind, but many of us are nervous about travelling there in the wake of recent attacks. However, the FCO map is mostly green, so set sail on the Nile and discover the country's living history. **EGYPT P.98**

Gavin Haines

I thought I knew Spain, and then I visited Cantabria. On a road trip, I stopped at rebooted royal resorts, faded villages and caves filled with prehistoric art, marvelling afresh at the surprising diversity this country has to offer. **SPAIN P.110**

Connor McGovern

History's greatest tea party and the Red Sox might spring to mind when it comes to Boston, but discovering its contemporary art scene revealed a whole new side to the city. This old classic is turning into a truly dynamic place to be. **BOSTON P.136**

Shaney Hudson

Giving Melbourne and Sydney a run for their money, Adelaide has become one of Australia's most exciting cities: a vibrant, cosmopolitan destination of food, wine and festivals, where beaches and countryside are both within easy reach. **ADELAIDE P.146**

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Editor's letter

In case you hadn't noticed, Peru's been having a bit of a moment. British Airways' resumption of direct flights to the capital, Lima, in 2016, after an absence of 34 years has coincided with a wealth of developments — the Belmond Andean Explorer train, a cable-car to the Kuelap ruins, new hotels across the country, restaurant awards galore...

Machu Picchu has long been the highlight for visitors — to the extent that numbers are now limited to protect the UNESCO World Heritage Site. But what might once have been a bucket-list country for backpackers has become a multifaceted destination with a modern infrastructure, meaning three-month overland trips are as viable as a two-week tour. What's more, Peru is no longer a gastronomic backwater, with chefs like Gastón Acurio, Virgilio Martínez and Diego Muñoz leading a culinary renaissance whose effect is being felt across the globe.

I had no idea what to expect when I landed in Lima two years ago, but I came away 10 days later bewitched by a country of unforgettable landscapes, beguiling people and culture, and food that I have to seek out on a regular basis.

This issue's cover story celebrates everything Peru — start planning your moment now.

PAT RIDDELL, EDITOR

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AWARD-WINNING NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER

French Travel Media Awards 2019: Best Art & Culture Feature • British Guild of Travel Writers Awards 2018: Best Travel Writer • Travel Media Awards 2018: Consumer Writer of the Year • AITO Travel Writer of the Year Awards 2018: Travel Blogger of the Year • Visit USA Media Awards 2018: Best Consumer Travel Magazine Feature • BSME Talent Awards 2018: Best Designer • LATA Media Awards 2018: Consumer Magazine Feature of the Year • French Travel Media Awards 2018: Best Wine & Gastronomy Feature • NATJA Travel Media Awards 2017: Photography: Overall Excellence — Print Publication • British Travel Awards 2017: Best Consumer Holiday Magazine • British Guild of Travel Writers Awards 2017: Best Travel Writer • British Guild of Travel Writers Awards 2016: Best Travel Writer • British Travel Awards 2015: Best Consumer Holiday Magazine

HIGHLIGHTS

Reader Awards

Have you had your say yet? Vote now in our annual awards to be in with a chance to win one of 27 incredible prizes (p.12).

The Masterclasses

Our full day of travel writing and photography sessions is back for 2019 with a fresh new programme — tickets are on sale now (p.44).

Big Sleep Awards 2019

From brilliantly bold revamps to slick city pads, we reveal the hottest new hotels that caught our eye (p.152).

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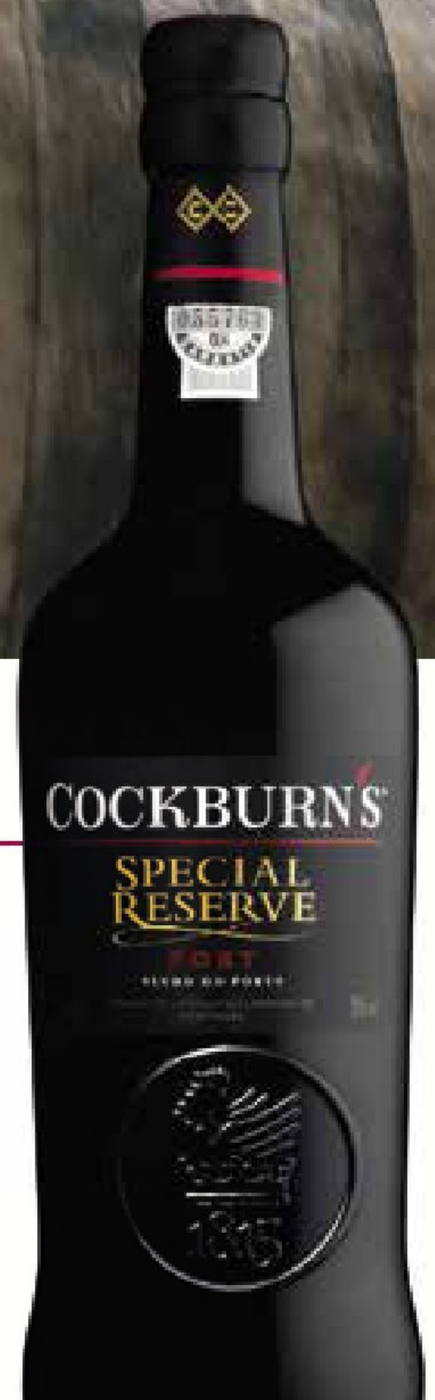

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER

READER AWARDS 2019

AND NOW IT'S OVER TO YOU!

Our Reader Awards are back for a fifth year and once again, we want to toast the travel industry's top players. Whether it's the destinations you can't get enough of, the airlines going that extra mile or the podcasts piquing your interest — these are the awards decided by YOU. We've got several exciting new categories this year, too, so it's time to get online, think back over your recent travels and pick your winners. Vote today and help your favourites get recognised!

VOTE ONLINE FOR A CHANCE TO WIN ONE OF THESE 27 FANTASTIC PRIZES!

IMAGES: GETTY

Cast your votes and don't miss out on the opportunity to win one of 27 fantastic prizes. Voting is open until 30 September. Have your say now at

nationalgeographic.co.uk/reader-awards

THE PRIZES

SEVEN NIGHTS FOR TWO IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The winner and a guest will jet off to this Caribbean paradise, courtesy of Air Europa, and stay at the Grand Bahia Principe Aquamarine in Punta Cana: a lush oasis with stunning beaches, swaying palms and ocean views. On offer is a free diving class in the hotel's swimming pool, and guests can take their pick from an array of dining options, including an international buffet, restaurants serving Japanese and Peruvian food, plus Italian and fine dining establishments. *bahia-principe.com aireuropa.com*

A TWO-NIGHT STAY FOR TWO IN THE LAKE DISTRICT

Set on the shores of Ullswater, Another Place, The Lake is ideal for those who value getting active as much as relaxing. The winner and a guest will receive two nights' B&B, with dinner included, as well as lake sports lessons and a spa treatment at the Swim Club. Guests can swim in the lake-view pool or follow in the footsteps of legendary fellwalker Alfred Wainwright and explore the region's dramatic landscapes. *another.place*

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THE WINNERS

Winners will be announced on 4 December 2019 at The Montcalm London Marble Arch, online and in our Jan/Feb 2020 issue. Prize draw closes 30 September at 23:59 GMT. Voting and prize draw open to residents of the UK and Ireland aged 18 and over. Prizes are subject to availability. Full T&Cs available at *nationalgeographic.co.uk/reader-awards*

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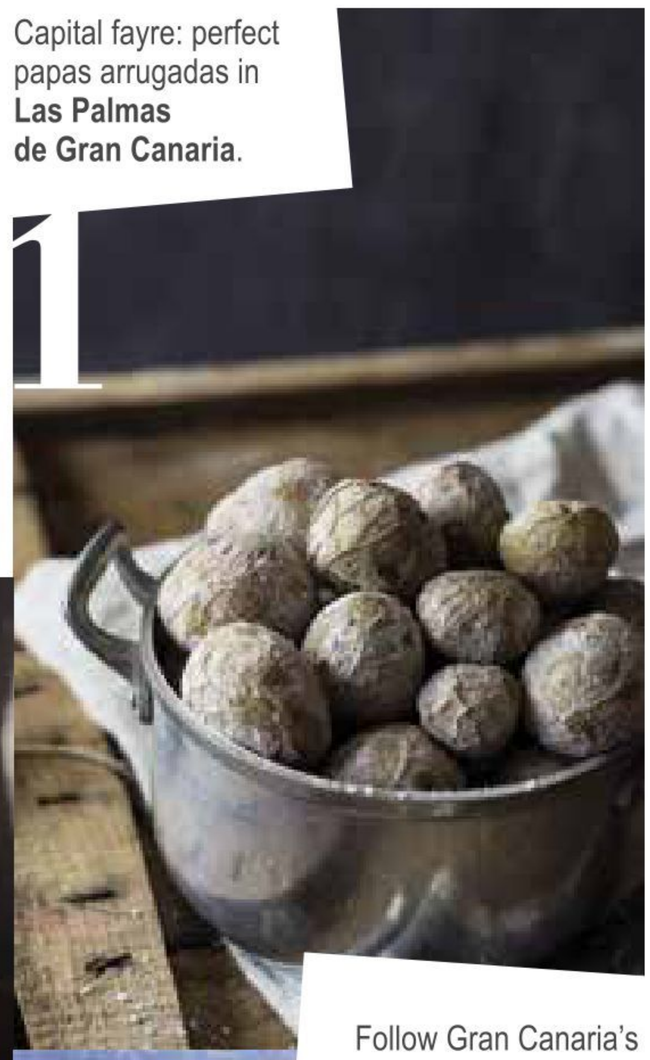
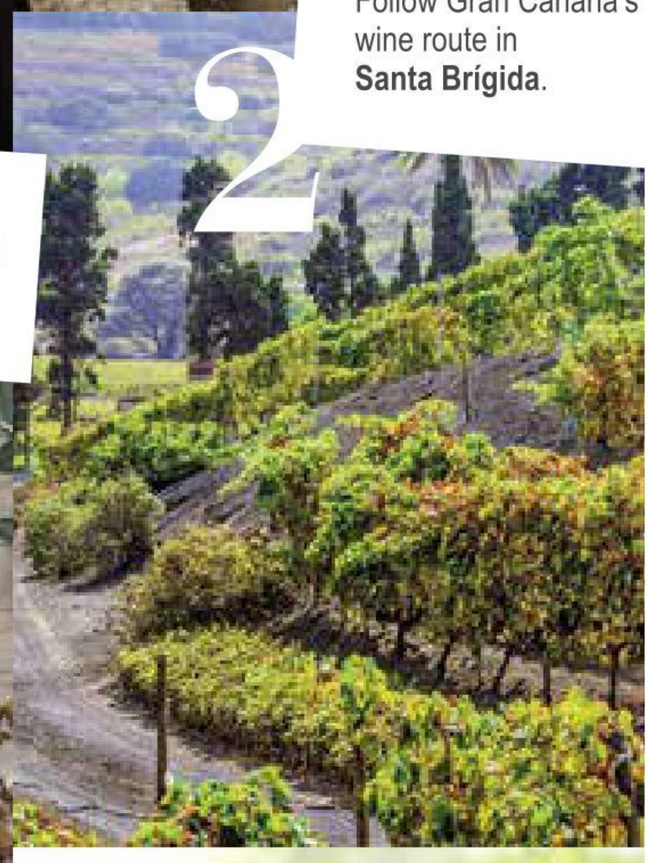
10 GASTRONOMIC REASONS TO **VISIT GRAN CANARIA**

Capital fayre: perfect papas arrugadas in **Las Palmas de Gran Canaria**.



Follow Gran Canaria's wine route in **Santa Brígida**.

2



Lose yourself exploring the extra virgin olive oils of **Agüimes**.

3

Taste tuna in **Mogán** fresh from the ocean rather than a can.

4

Join the flourishing almond appreciation society in **Tejeda**.

10

Savour Queen Elizabeth II's favourite tomatoes in **La Aldea de San Nicolás**.

5

6

Hit the heights of **Artenara** and sample their mountain goat cuisine.

7

Enjoy a break in **Agaete**, the only place to produce coffee in Europe.

8

Say it with award-winning flower cheese in **Santa María de Guía**.

9

Experience a sugar rush with Arehucas rum, caning it in **Arucas** since 1884.

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SMART TRAVELLER

What's new // Do it now // Food // On the trail // Rooms // Family // Stay at home // The word

SNAPSHOT

Olga, Oaxaca, Mexico

Oaxaca, in the south west of Mexico, is known for its handicrafts, such as pottery, wood carving and textiles. I met Olga while on a trip with local non-profit organisation En Vi, which works to empower women in the community. She was busy preparing cochineal, a red dye made from the beetles that live in the prickly pear cacti hung up behind her. Along with other natural dyes, the brilliant, crimson-red pigment is used to colour the woven textiles that Teotitlan, Olga's village, is known for.

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Editors' picks

From cultural happenings to uber-cool openings, our team have unearthed the latest travel highlights

HEAD FOR THE LAKES

For the first time in 25 years, flights have taken off from Carlisle Lake District Airport, linking Cumbria to Dublin, Belfast and Southend five days a week. It might have missed its planned opening date last summer, but there's good news for passengers: parking is free and there's a free shuttle bus straight into Carlisle city centre. *carlisleairport.co.uk*

CONNOR MCGOVERN

TRAVEL TIPPLES

From the beaches of Brazil to the Scottish Highlands, the cocktail menu at new Sydney bar Jackalberry jets across the globe like a tipsy travel itinerary. Sip tipples inspired by Kyoto's bamboo forest (sake, Roku gin, cucumber) or the Hampstead Heath woodlands (Sipsmith gin, blackberry sorbet, cardamom syrup, rosewater). Set in the heart of Sydney's Central Business District, eats are equally explorer-friendly, including Shanghai pork and sesame bao, and Norwegian-style salt cod fritters. *jackalberry.com.au* **STEPHANIE CAVAGNARO**

TRY IT AT HOME:

'BATIDA ORELLANA' INSPIRED BY IPANEMA, BRAZIL

80ml combined custard apple/coconut puree
45ml Sagatiba Cachaça Pura
15ml Batida de Côco liqueur
15ml simple syrup
5ml lime juice
coconut curls

Add all ingredients to a cocktail shaker. Shake well with ice and strain over rocks in a tall cocktail glass. Garnish the drink with the coconut curls.

THE GREENHOUSE EFFECT

The UK's first completely vegan hotel has opened this summer. Based in Highland Perthshire, Saorsa 1875 — run by a mother and son — has taken over a Victorian manor house and filled it with everything from a plant-based menu and natural cleaning products to upcycled furniture and ethically sourced bedding in its 13 rooms. *saorsahotel.com* **TAMSIN WRESSELL**

IN NUMBERS

UNESCO'S NEW WORLD HERITAGE SITES

29
new sites added for 2019

1945
the year the UK's Jodrell Bank Observatory was established

5
caravanserai in the former Silk Road market town of Sheki, Azerbaijan

2,200
temples in the ancient city of Bagan, Myanmar

1,200
rooms in Portugal's Palácio Nacional de Mafra. *unesco.org*

JOSEPHINE PRICE

IMAGES: GETTY; ALAMY

BIG PICTURE

Kampala, Uganda

Located in downtown Kampala, the Old Taxi Park has become a tourist attraction in its own right. It's one of the liveliest places I've ever visited — more than 3,000 minibus taxis, locally known as *matatus*, enter and leave the area each day. Alongside them, thousands of *boda bodas* (motorcycle taxis) weave in between pedestrians and cyclists. When I slipped into a nearby buildingto photograph the scene from above, I found a hairdresser had set up shop on one of the balconies. There was a real contrast here: calm, coiffured costumers and the commotion of the Old Taxi Park below.
FEDERICO REDIN // PHOTOGRAPHER

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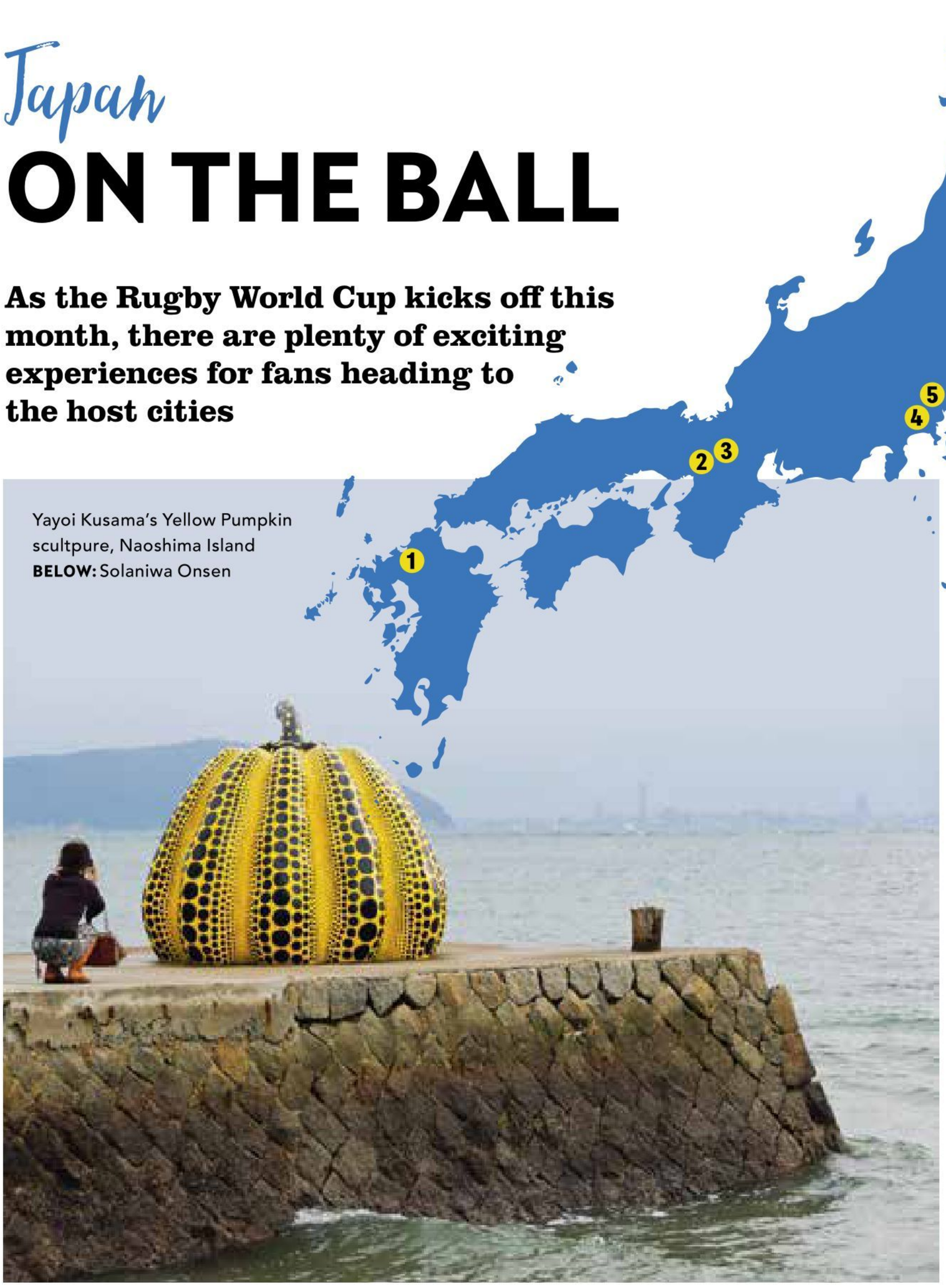
One of the 50 winning images from Portrait of Humanity 2019. portraitofhumanity.co

Japan

ON THE BALL

As the Rugby World Cup kicks off this month, there are plenty of exciting experiences for fans heading to the host cities



Yayoi Kusama's Yellow Pumpkin scultpure, Naoshima Island
BELOW: Solaniwa Onsen

1 FUKUOKA
Opening this month, the Miyako Hotel Hakata is ideal for fans looking to bed down in this southern city. Rooms are decked out in neutral tones with city views, while the restaurants' menus focus on ingredients from the island of Kyushu. But the main attractions are outside: vertical gardens, a rooftop infinity pool, waterfall and spa. *miyakohotels.ne.jp*

2 KOBE
Kobe may be famed for its prized beef, but it's also just over an hour away by train from Takamatsu, home of the Setouchi Triennale (until 4 November). Scattered across islands in the Seto Inland Sea, the eclectic arts festival features temporary installations and a packed programme of workshops and multimedia performances. *setouchi-artfest.jp/en*

3 OSAKA
Opened earlier this year, the Solaniwa Onsen offers a new take on an ancient tradition — a hot spring-style theme park. Don your kimono and drift between steaming baths landscaped into a recreated 17th-century village, complete with natural springs and rocky foot baths, a rooftop garden and a range of restaurants showcasing the very best of Japanese cuisine. *solaniwa.com*

4 YOKOHAMA
Catch the last few nights of the Yamate Rose Terrace's pop-up beer garden in Harbour View Park until 23 September. Sip sake and tuck into barbecued bites while enjoying hillside views of the twinkly harbour lights and the arc of the Yokohama Bay Bridge. It's a safe bet for visitors looking for a slice of Yokohama's lively social scene.

5 TOKYO
The Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo reopened in March, following an overhaul to mark its 20th anniversary. The bastion of the Japanese capital's edgy art scene is stuffed with diverse works from the past 75 years. Don't miss the 'Now, it's time to play' exhibition — fun-filled, interactive artworks, involving climbing, painting, crafting and more. *mot-art-museum.jp/en*

HELEN WARWICK

IMAGE: GETTY

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High Line New York City
BELOW: Villa Borghese Gardens

Urban parks

GOING GREEN

As cities swell, the need for nature gets ever greater. Here's to the places giving their urban landscapes a verdant revamp

New York

The High Line — Manhattan's urban greenway — turns 10 this year and to mark the occasion, its final stage has just been opened to the public. Linking the walkway with new development Hudson Yards, the Spur features scenic balconies, giant planters and a piazza. It's also home to the Plinth, a permanent exhibition space for a rotating series of artists. *thehighline.org*

Toronto

Things are getting greener in the concrete jungle of Canada's largest city. Earlier this year, The Bentway opened beneath the Gardiner Expressway; with gardens, events spaces and a skate trail, the mile-long park has turned an underused space into an urban playground. The paving even uses recycled construction debris. *thebentway.ca*

Rome

For all its eternal beauty, Rome's green spaces have started to show their age. The good news is that the city's now spending €12 (£10.7) million on sprucing up its parks and gardens, such as those around the Colosseum and the family favourite, the Villa Borghese Gardens. As part of a major overhaul of public spaces and services, the council will be carrying out a number of improvements for Romans and visitors alike, including planting new trees, repairing fountains and introducing community sports facilities. **CONNOR MCGOVERN**

Brisbane

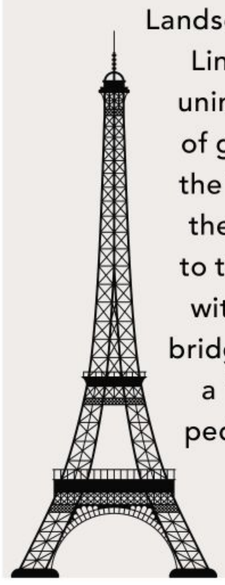
Could Queensland's capital be home the world's greatest urban park? Possibly, if Brisbane's ambitious plans take off. The Victoria Park Golf Course will reopen as a 45-hectare grassy oasis that the city hopes will rival the likes of Central and Hyde Parks. Markets, play areas and cinemas are rumoured to be part of the plan, so watch this (green) space. *victoriapark.com.au*

IMAGES: ALAMY; GETTY

PARIS

Winning streak

Forget gold, silver and bronze — the French capital is firmly set on green for the 2024 Olympic Games as it looks to improve access and biodiversity in what are set to be the most sustainable Olympics yet. Landscaping project One Line will see a near-uninterrupted avenue of greenery run from the Trocadéro, under the Eiffel Tower and to the École Militaire, with the Pont d'Iéna bridge transformed into a 'green bridge' for pedestrians. *gp-b.com*



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Undertourism

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

In the age of overtourism, the world's less-visited destinations are seeing a new opportunity

This is the year of overtourism — Venice announced plans to charge for entry, Bruges capped cruise ship numbers at two per day and Paris drew up plans to ban tourist buses from the city centre.

A new phenomenon is developing, however, that looks to draw visitors to those destinations that often fly under the radar. 'Undertourism' is the increasingly common marketing tactic being used by less-frequented destinations. Come here, they say, because we're not as overrun as the neighbours. Visit us, and you won't have to queue at every attraction.

So how can we best appreciate these lesser-visited spots? One way is to pursue a deeper, more immersive experience, rather than taking on the hit-and-run attitude some visitors have. It's an approach even the destinations flooded with visitors are adopting, as they actively promote their quieter corners: Venice, for example, suggests swapping St Mark's Square for the Lido, a beach-fronted island where most restaurants and hotels are locally owned. Venezia Autentica — a start-up that highlights the city's time-honoured artisans — steers visitors away from the tourist traps and towards local bars, shops and restaurants. Vienna's clever new marketing campaign, meanwhile, urges visitors to ditch their phones, ignore the online reviews and be fully present in the Austrian capital for themselves.

Alternatively, undertourism might simply mean picking a destination that needs the backing, such as Puerto Rico post-Hurricane Maria, or Sri Lanka now the Foreign Office has relaxed its travel advice following the Easter bombings. And isn't that support something we should all be getting behind? **JULIA BUCKLEY**

San Juan, Puerto Rico

THINK TWICE: ALTERNATIVE FAVOURITES

LIKE PHUKET? TRY KEP

As Cambodia's south becomes more and more popular, Kep has retained its laid-back vibe with its crab shacks and jungly coastline. The beaches are some of Southeast Asia's best, too. Audley Travel has 14 days in Cambodia from £3,055 per person, including flights and transfers. *audleytravel.com*

LIKE VENICE? TRY TRIESTE

Just a couple of hours from Venice by train, this elegant Italian city sits wedged in beside Slovenia. Cantilevered over the shimmering Gulf of Trieste, it has a handsome canal all of its own. Kirker has three nights from £739 per person, B&B, including flights and transfers. *kirkerholidays.com*

LIKE MACHU PICCHU? TRY KUELAP

This dramatic Incan site of 400 stone houses perched on the mountaintop is, in fact, older than Machu Picchu. There's also a cable-car if you can't face the trek. Journey Latin America offers 15 days in the north of Peru from £2,686 per person, including flights, hotels and excursions. *journeylatinamerica.co.uk*

Hot air ballooning

BLOWN AWAY

Take to the skies in a hot air balloon and see the world from a new perspective

The UK's largest balloon festival — the Bristol International Balloon Fiesta — is commemorating another airborne icon this year as festivities focus on the 50th anniversary of Concorde. If you can't join the celebrations on home turf, then there are plenty of other destinations around the world that offer awe-inspiring views from above. But whether it's California or Cambodia, be aware: flights are weather dependent, meaning trips are often subject to change. *bristonballoonfiesta.com*

COLD

GSTAAD, SWITZERLAND

Wrap up for January's International Balloon Festival in the Swiss Alpine town of Château-d'Oex and watch brightly coloured balloons drift over snow-white peaks. Don't miss the Night Glow event with evening balloon displays and fireworks. 25 January-February in 2020. *chateau-doex.ch/en*

HOT

ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

The climate in New Mexico is ideal for ballooning on more than 300 days of the year, but it's not until the autumn that it all really takes off. The International Balloon Fiesta is the largest of its kind in the world, and sees the sky filled with over 500 colourful balloons from dawn to dusk. 5-13 October. *balloonfiesta.com*

Best for...

COUNTRYSIDE

Sip, Cycle and Soar balloon flights float over California's Sonoma County before landing for a nine-mile bike tour of the region's wineries. Around $344 (£272) per person. *up-away.com*

TEMPLES

Drift above 2,000 temples and pagodas along the Irrawaddy River in the Mandalay region of Myanmar. From $315 (£249) per person (classic, eight people in a basket). *tucantravel.com*

CITY VIEWS

Stay at the Four Seasons in Florence and join a balloon ride over the city's most famous landmarks. From £4,860 for three nights, B&B, and the balloon flight. *fourseasons.com*

IN NUMBERS

13 days

the duration of the first solo circumnavigation of the globe in a hot air balloon

1783

the year of the first untethered manned hot air balloon flight

68,986ft

the altitude record for a hot air balloon flight. **SAM LEWIS**

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VILLA

Sostaga

BOUTIQUE HOTEL

Inspiring *Lifetime* Memories

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ROMANTIK

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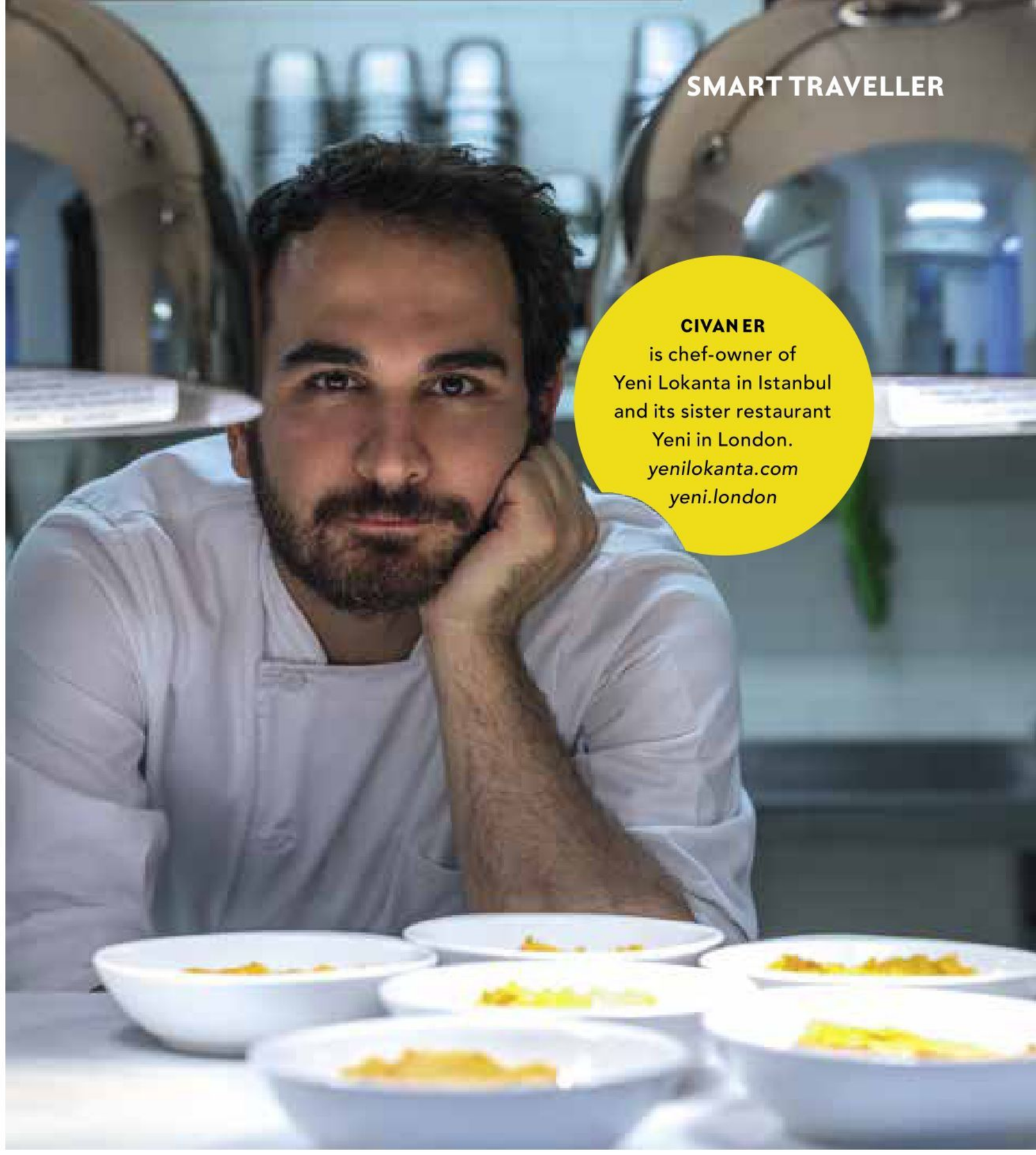
AT THE Chef's TABLE

Istanbul offers a wealth of epicurean experiences. Civan Er shares the best of his hometown

Turkey's largest city has been a meeting point of different ethnicities — and their cuisines — for centuries. Those passing through have brought aspects of their own food culture to the city, and today you can find fine examples of kebabs, meze, one-pot dishes, pastries and much more. For a dining experience that's distinctly 'Istanbul', try *işkembe çorbacısı* (tripe soup) with garlic sauce; restaurants serve it in the middle of the night to ease your stomach after a few glasses of raki, but it's even better as a hangover cure the next day.



CIVAN ER is chef-owner of Yeni Lokanta in Istanbul and its sister restaurant Yeni in London. *yenilokanta.com* *yeni.london*

WHERE TO EAT

ZÜBEYIR OCAKBAŞI: This is by far the best kebab restaurant in Istanbul. My top dish? *Beyti*, a minced kebab with garlic and parsley. *zubeyirocakbasi.com.tr*

ÇIYA: Head here for regional dishes even some locals aren't familiar with, like *yeni dünya kebabı* (minced meat with loquat). *ciya.com.tr*

DÖNERCI ŞAHIN USTA: Over by the Grand Bazaar, this local favourite makes some of the best döner kebabs you'll ever taste. Open for lunch only. *T: +90 212 526 52 97.*

THE DISHES

Manti
These minced meat dumplings, served with garlic yoghurt, are a popular dish in homes across Turkey.

Lahmacun
Thin pastry or flatbread dough is topped with minced meat and cooked in a wood-fired oven.

Lüfer
Also known as bluefish, lüfer is Turkey's most delicious fish. It's at its best during the winter months.

Simit and cheese
For breakfast, try this tempting combination of sesame bread rings topped with cheese (usually feta).

Must buy

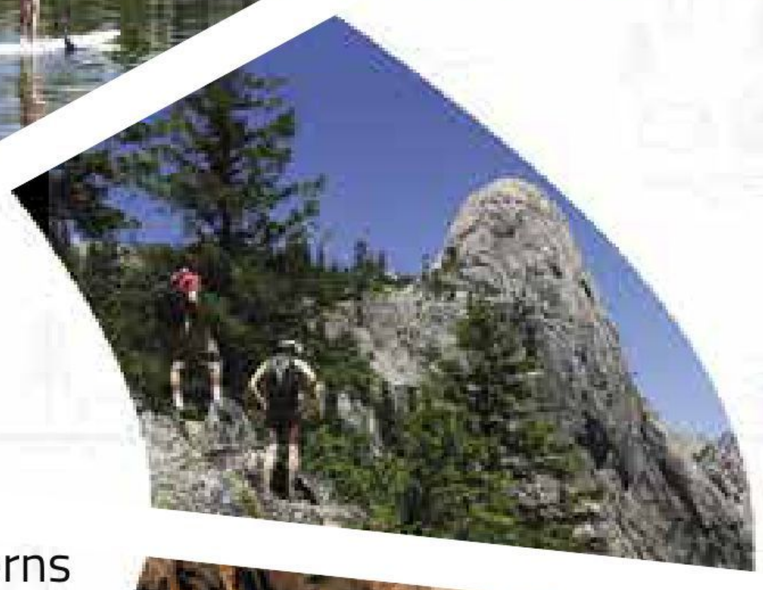
Urfa biber (also known as isot pepper) — stock up on the dried flakes, which have a lovely nutty flavour, at the city's Spice Bazaar.

IMAGES: ALAMY; GETTY

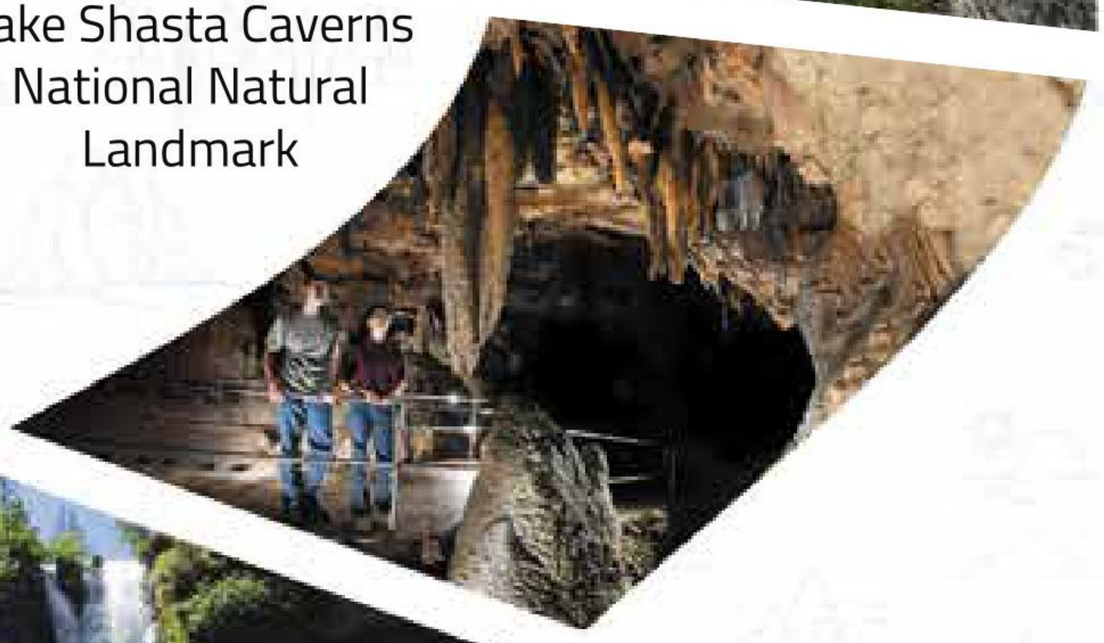
WHERE WILL THE TAKE YOU?

Sundial Bridge

Lassen Volcanic National Park



Castle Crags State Park



Lake Shasta Caverns National Natural Landmark

McArthur-Burney Falls Memorial State Park

The unforgettable road trip you've been looking to take is waiting for you in UpState California. Discover the national and state parks that dot the landscape of the Shasta Cascade region, which is filled with majestic waterfalls and volcanic activity. Make your way to Redding to walk across the iconic Sundial Bridge and cruise across Shasta Lake to see beautiful limestone caves. Feel the freedom of the open road without the crowds in UpState California.

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BEAT GENERATION

San Francisco

From landmark bookstores to characterful cafes, find the old haunts of Ferlinghetti, Kerouac and Ginsberg in the city's North Beach neighbourhood. Words: Angela Locatelli

1 LIVE WORMS GALLERY

Start off at this grungy gallery — where the Beat Museum opened its first temporary location in 2006 — and get a feel for North Beach's bohemian art scene. A small space, it's a hub for the local artistic community. *sflivewormsgallery.com*

2 CAFFE TRIESTE

Take a pew at the first espresso house on the West Coast (opened in 1956), which was a popular writing spot for many of the Beats. While here, pay homage to Francis Ford Coppola, who wrote much of the screenplay for *The Godfather* here. *caffetrieste.com*

3 BEAT MUSEUM

Book a tour here to immerse yourself in the full counter-culture experience. The museum's extensive collection houses more than 1,000 pieces of Beat-era memorabilia, ranging from manuscripts and photos to letters. *kerouac.com*

4 CITY LIGHTS BOOKSELLERS & PUBLISHERS

Perhaps the heart of the trail, this bookstore was co-founded by poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti and published Allen Ginsberg's quintessential poem *Howl*. Choose a title from the banned books section or enjoy a poetry performance. *citylights.com*

5 VESUVIO CAFE

Just across the street is this legendary pitstop, clad in colourful tiles and adorned with a mish-mash of art and antiques. A regular hangout of Kerouac, it's been popular with fans of the Beats for the past 50 years. *vesuvio.com*

6 JACK KEROUAC ALLEY

Take a moment to linger on Jack Kerouac Alley (formerly Adler Place, but renamed in the writer's honour). Beat-related murals adorn the walls, but look out for the paving stones engraved with quotes by the likes of Steinbeck and Kerouac himself.

7 LI PO COCKTAIL LOUNGE

Wind down at the Li Po Cocktail Lounge, named after the Chinese poet who, like the Beats, had a taste for wine, poetry and adventure. A popular after-hours joint, its red leather booths are perfect for some hushed conversation. *lipolounge.com*

LANGUAGE OF THE BIRDS

On the corner of Columbus Avenue and Broadway is Language of the Birds, a permanent art installation with suspended, bird-like books that celebrates the neighbourhood's literary history

ILLUSTRATION: MARTIN HAAKE

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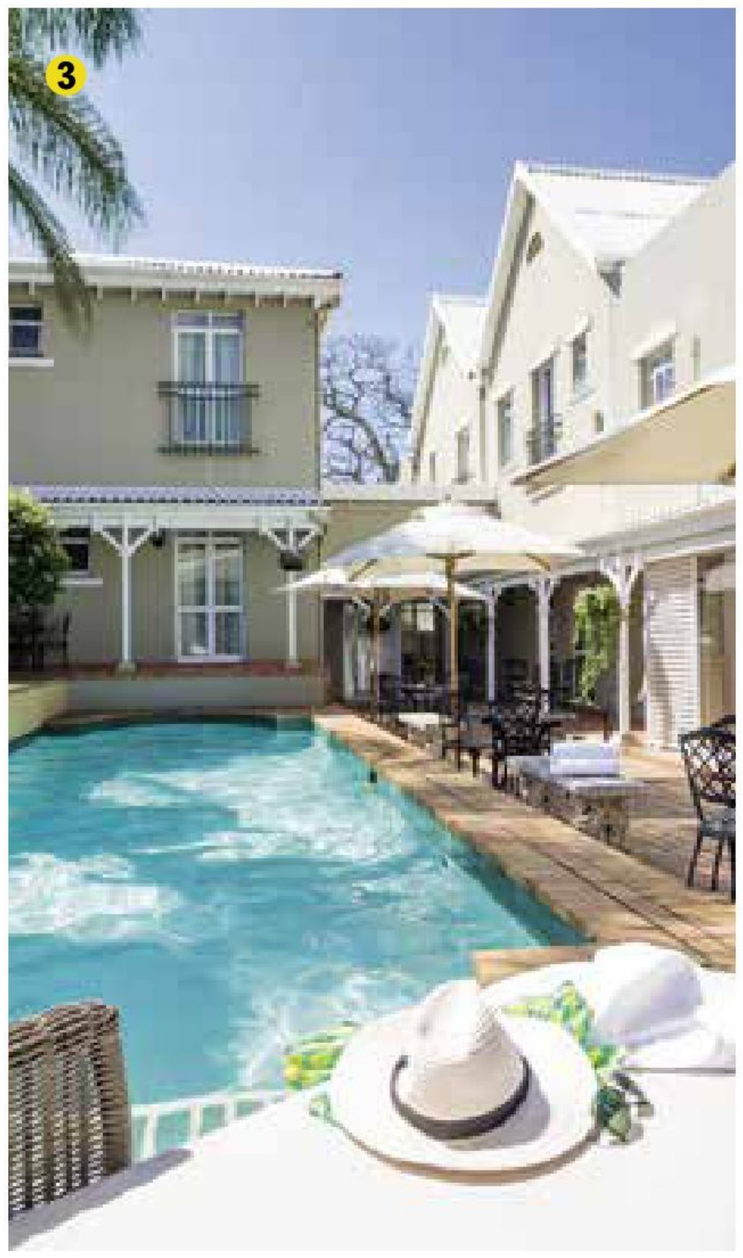
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WHERE TO STAY

Durban

Now with direct flights from the UK, the South African city's hotel scene is more accessible than ever

1 ONOMO HOTEL DURBAN

Casablanca-based chain Onomo has properties all over Africa and last year opened the doors to its Durban property, a modern building located on the outskirts of the Central Business District, just a couple of blocks from the beachfront boardwalk.

The look in the rooms is urban rather than beachy: faux brick walls, dark parquet floors and floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the high-rise skyline. The entry-level rooms are pretty snug; then again, you'll likely be spending much of your time on the beach or in the pool. The buffet breakfast — complete with omelette station — is a hit. From £74. *onomohotel.com*

2 CURIOCITY DURBAN

Don't be put off by Curiocity's hostel status — as well as dorms, it also has a selection of private rooms, both simple digs with shared bathrooms and premium en suite options. As well as plenty of art, a popular bar and a courtyard for yoga, there's also a superb range of well-priced excursions and activities on offer. From £37 (shared bathroom) or £55 (premium), room only. *curiocity.africa*

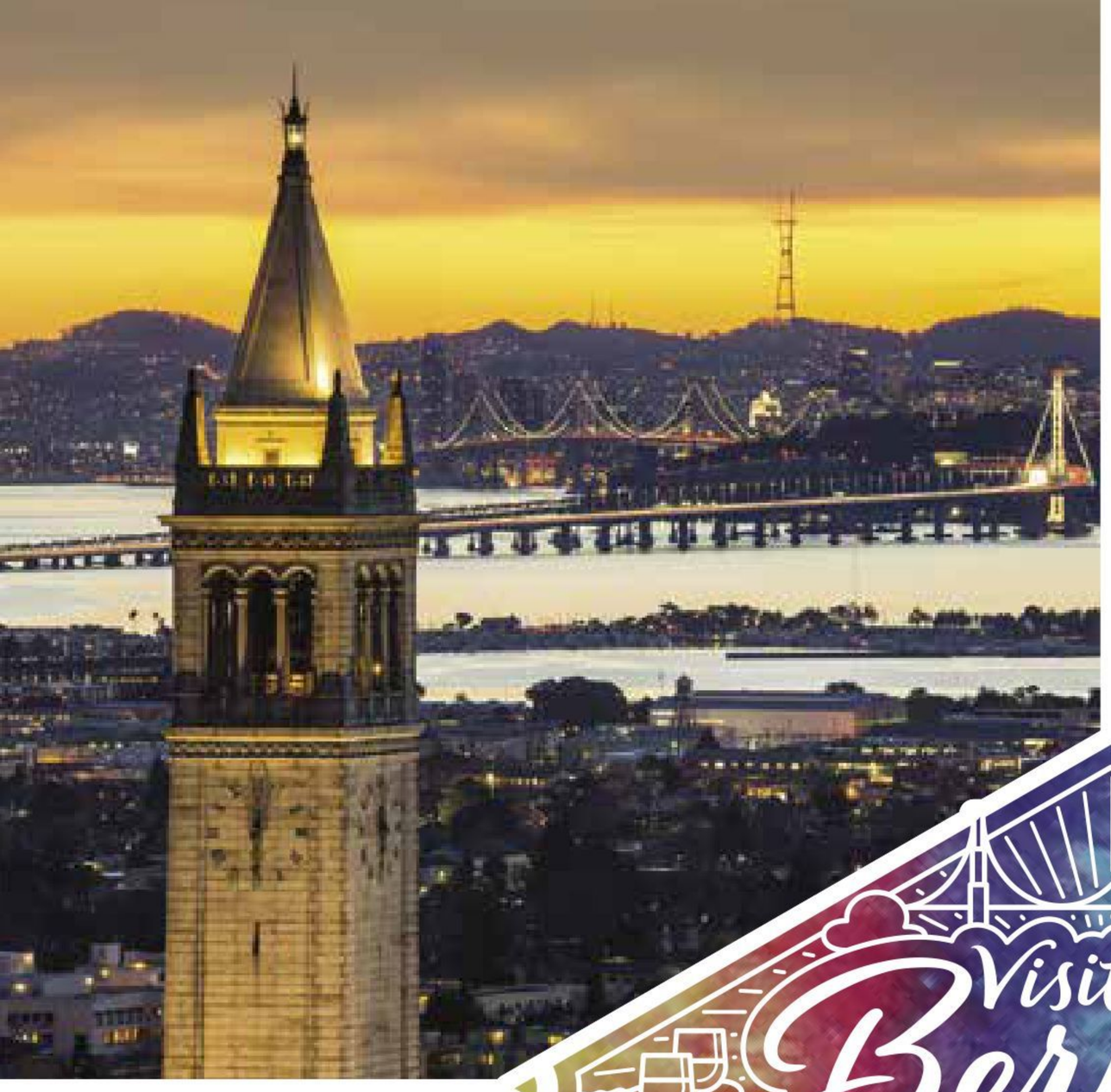
3 THE BENJAMIN

There's a homely feel to this swish, 43-room place on Florida Road, housed in one of the city's historic buildings. The rooms, arranged around the pool, are the epitome of tasteful, with neutral tones spruced up by jazzy cushions and throws. Breakfast is served in the poolside conservatory. From £101. *benjamin.co.za*

4 MAKARANGA

This retreat lies just 20 minutes' drive from the city — although it feels far more remote once you're in the rambling grounds, complete with sculptures, Japanese garden and labyrinth. The rooms are classy, and you'll find anything from classic four-poster beds to oversized statement headboards. The emphasis, however, remains firmly on the views. From £79. *makaranga.com* **JULIA BUCKLEY**

ALL RATES STATED ARE FOR STANDARD DOUBLES, B&B, UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED



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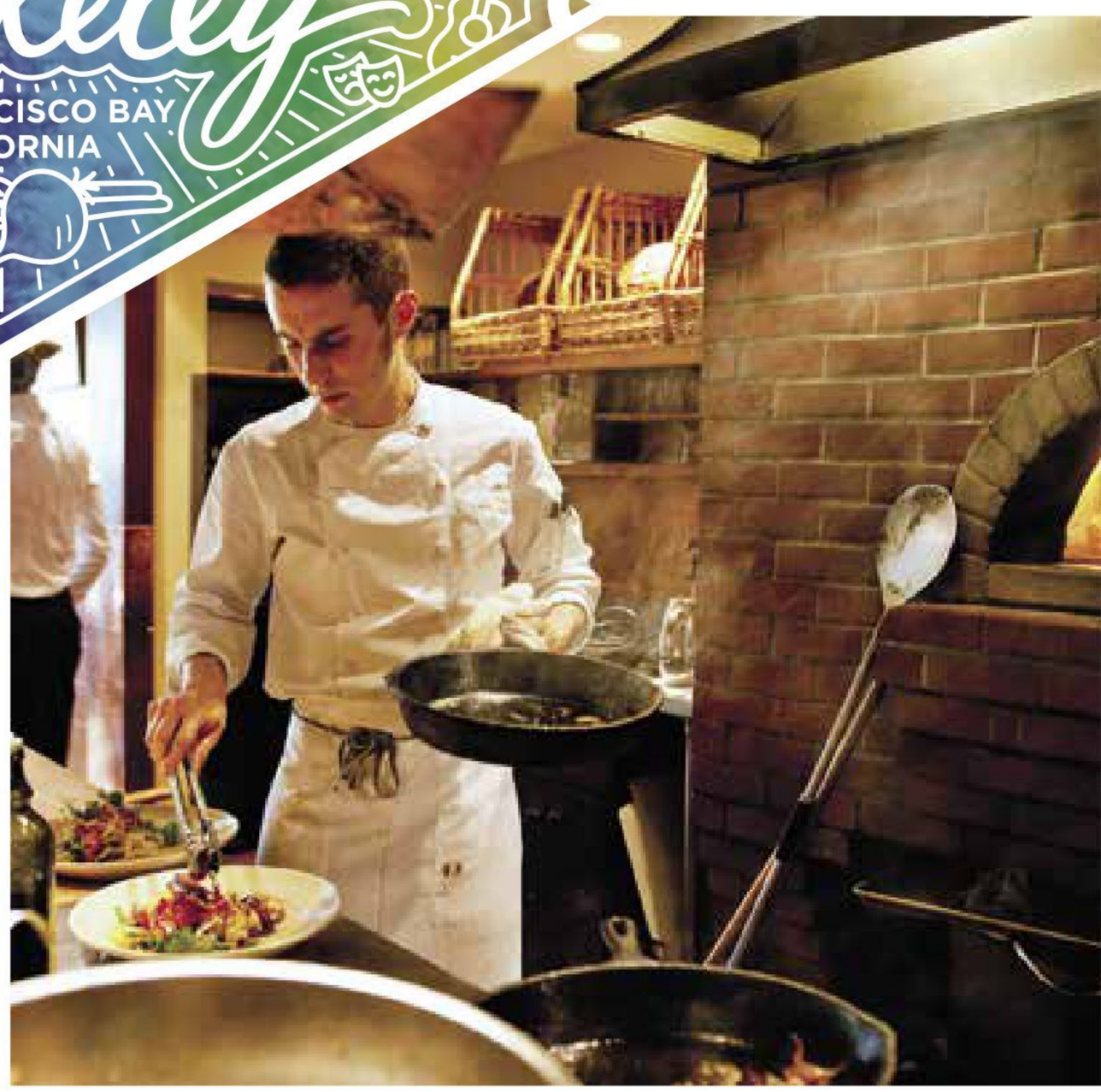

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Forest retreats

DOWN TO THE WOODS

Full of opportunity to adventure, forests make the perfect family escape. We tried-and-tested one woodland retreat and share our pick of the best

Set in the green heart of the postcard-pretty Forest of Dean, guests are spoilt for choice when it comes to bedding down at Whitemead Forest Park. Go for one of the seven wooden glamping pods added this season: with two bedrooms, they have a lounge, dining area, fully fitted kitchen, bathroom and an ever-popular hot tub.

WHAT TO DO: Set off on a nature trail through the scenic woodland or make a splash at the on-site swimming pool. There are plenty of other outdoor activities, too, including archery, crazy carts, zorbing, fencing, teddy bear-making, and arts and crafts.

THE KIDS SAY: "The archery was excellent — the session lasted ages and we actually got pretty good at it by the end."

THE PARENTS SAY: "The kids loved being able to walk around the park safely as it wasn't too big, and our pod was near the entertainment, restaurant and leisure centre. A morning run in the fresh air followed by scrambled eggs for breakfast was a wonderful way to spend a Sunday morning."

HIGHS: The peaceful, rural setting. Oh, and the hot tub. Day or night, the kids loved it.

LOWS: The on-site entertainment may not be for everyone.

VERDICT: A family weekend in the Forest of Dean was the ideal tonic for a hectic city lifestyle. The kids were relaxed and happy and really opened up as the weekend progressed. They learned amazing skills such as fencing — when else would we have time to do this? There's plenty to do, but if you'd rather soak in the hot tub with a good book, that's an option too.

HOW TO DO IT: Prices for a cabin with a hot tub start from £98 per night, based on a four-night midweek break.

WHO TRAVELLED: Matthew and Natalie Jackson and children: Sophie (15), Leah (12) and Noah (10). *whitemead.co.uk*

THREE TO BOOK

BLACKWOOD FOREST

Full of bluebells in spring and flame-coloured leaves in the autumn, this Hampshire forest is the perfect arboreal escape. Forest Holidays' cosy wooden cabins sit deep in the woods, which provide a beautiful setting for hikes and bike rides. Forest Holidays is currently working with National Parks on a five-year programme to connect more than 20,000 young people with nature. From £635 for long weekends (three nights) for a family of four. *forestholidays.com*

NEW FOREST

It might be the UK's smallest national park, but it offers plenty of outdoor adventures with winding streams, heathland and dappled glades, all roamed by the Forest's famous ponies. The cosy Beaulieu Tree Lodge is a family forest retreat with three bedrooms has a private terrace and is within easy reach of the National Motor Museum, too. From £177 a night. *coolstays.com*

DOWNASH WOOD

Oakey Koakey Treehouse in leafy East Sussex ticks all the boxes: stylish, secluded and ideally placed for exploring this wooded swathe of the South East. Book with Canopy & Stars — the company has just launched a mission to plant one million trees, so you'll also do your bit to protect our precious woodlands. From £170 a night for four people. *canopyandstars.co.uk*

IMAGES: GETTY; ALAMY

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TURISMO DE PORTUGAL algarve

LIKE A LOCAL

Porto

Portugal's second city is creating quite a stir on the gastronomy front, with chefs putting bold new riffs on local flavours

Nightlife in Porto; **RIGHT FROM TOP:** Graham's Lodge Museum; Bifana and bread at Euskalduna Studio; **BELOW:** barista, Bird of Passage

Gourmet heights

Headed up by chef Vasco Coelho Santos, **EUSKALDUNA STUDIO** walks the culinary high-wire with a 'surprise' 10-course menu. Just 16 diners (eight at sleek oak tables, eight at a marble counter facing the open kitchen) are treated to a season-driven feast, in which each dish is a mini work of art. *euskaldunastudio.pt*

If you can't get a table, nearby is recently opened **ALMEJA**, a bistro, revolutionising the city's food scene with its delicious five-course tasting menu for just €55 (£47). João Cura takes pride in sourcing locally and serving simple, ingredient-focused dishes like fish of the day with salsify, kale and demi-glace, and sheep's milk ice cream with sugar beet and crowberries. *almejaporto.com*

Edging slightly west, just off the Avenida dos Aliados, is urban-cool, butcher shop-themed **MUU STEAKHOUSE**. Carnivores will be in their element as it's all about the meat here: start off with crisp, yolky Scotch eggs — a tantalising prelude to a garlicky, melt-in-the-mouth rib-eye. *muusteakhouse.com*

Over in the district of Vila Nova de Gaia, chef Ricardo Costa's **THE YEATMAN** is a two-Michelin-starred stunner with flawless service and great views over the Douro river. Tasting menus reveal a seasonal slant, along the lines of lobster with cuttlefish and yuzu, Thai skate with coconut and lime, and veal three ways. *the-yeatman-hotel.com*

If you fancy escaping the city, head out to Foz, where the Douro meets the Atlantic, and discover the Michelin-starred **PEDRO LEMOS**. At this intimate, subtly lit spot, the menu goes for robust flavours like ultra-fresh white grouper with asparagus, clams and Jerusalem artichokes. *pedrolemos.net*

IMAGE: GETTY

Ports of call

You're not short of places to try the city's revered fortified wine. If you only have time for one port tasting, make it British-founded **GRAHAM'S**, going strong since 1820. This port lodge has tipples ranging from zesty, bone-dry white port (chill and pair with tonic as a gin alternative) to rich, aged tawnies. Tour the cellar before a tasting with views at Vinum, where the historic city centre opens up like a pop-up book from the terrace. *grahams-port.com*

If you're after a more Portuguese flavour, however, then head to riverfront **CÁLEM** for a spin of its musty port cellars. Best of all are the tastings, pairing jammy, red-fruit vintage rubies and exceptional tawnies with chocolate and cheese. *tour.calem.pt*

Guided three-port tastings are also offered at **TOURIGA**, near Aliados metro. The shop is a cavern of highly regarded and lesser-known ports and wines, with affordable shipping rates. *facebook.com/tourigavinhosdeportugal*

Prefer more of a bar vibe? **PORTOLOGIA**, is rustic wine cellar and bar in the Ribeira district. Informal three-port tastings start at €10 (£8.87), but the sky's the limit when cracking open the aged whites and 40-year-old tawnies. Pair with local cheeses, meats and sardines. *portologia.com*

THE WINE QUAY BAR comes into its own at sunset, meanwhile, with stellar views over the river. Here, delicious Douro wines can be matched with mountain cheese, cured ham and olives. *winequaybar.com* **KERRY WALKER**

TOP TIP

Get into the city's foodie groove on Taste Porto's three-and-a-half-hour walking tour. Guides take you everywhere from retro-cool *conservas* (tinned fish) shops to patisseries making traditional conventual sweets.

RICARDO BROCHADO'S

favourite spots

TRIGO DE CANTOS

All the produce on offer here comes from Amarante, about 35 miles from Porto. The smoked ham, cheese and organic wines are great, and the wood-fired bread goes amazingly well with grilled *chouriço* (pork sausage) and *morcela* (black pudding). *facebook.com/trigodecantos*

MONSTRA NACIONAL

My all-time favourite northern Portuguese dessert is *pudim Abade de Priscos*, which is made with loads of egg yolks. This is the go-to place — they serve delicious old-fashioned Portuguese desserts. *T: 00 351 22 408 2898.*

BIRD OF PASSAGE

Belgian barista Paolo opened this coffee shop in 2018. Call in for coffee made with carefully selected beans from all over the world. The eggs Benedict, porridge and homemade cakes are all delicious. *birdofpassagecoffee.com*

PROVA

Diogo, the owner of this jazz bar, has excellent taste in both wine and music, but my personal favourite is the full-bodied António Madeira red from the Dão region paired with a delicious raw-milk goat's cheese from Beira Baixa. *prova.com.pt*

CAFE CANDELABRO

There are 160 different wines by the glass in this second-hand bookstore that's been transformed into a one-of-a-kind bar. It's a great place to chill, both inside and on the terrace. *cafecandelabro.com*

Ricardo Brochado is a food-obsessed tour guide with Taste Porto. tasteporto.com

CHURCHILL'S

PORT

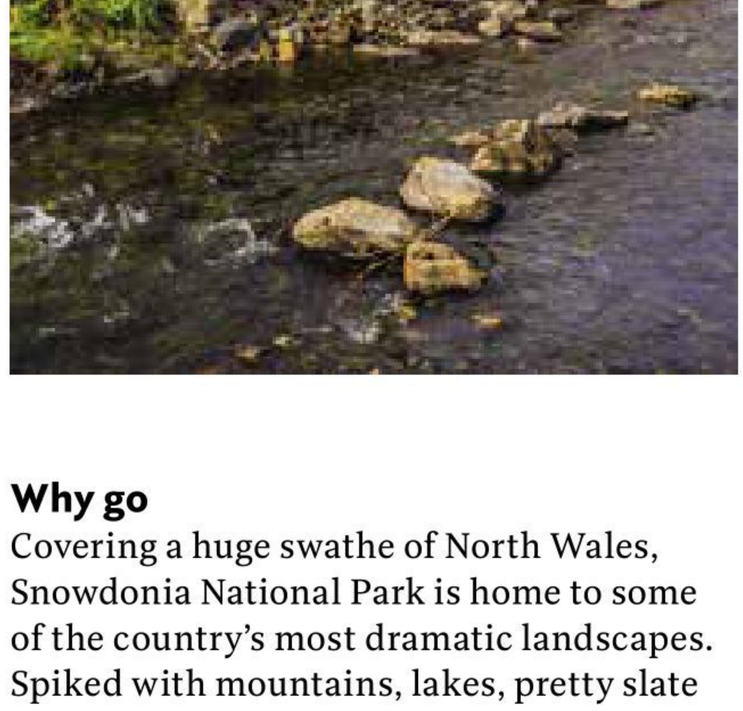
A TWIST ON TRADITION

White Port Tonic

Stay at home

SNOWDONIA

It's all about the outdoors in this wild Welsh region, whether you're climbing Snowdon itself or paddling on rapids



Why go

Covering a huge swathe of North Wales, Snowdonia National Park is home to some of the country's most dramatic landscapes. Spiked with mountains, lakes, pretty slate villages and the odd castle, it's ideal hiking territory, and alongside well-trodden routes you'll find quieter tracks where sheep are your only company. It's ripe for road trips too, with scenic drives connecting the best hikes, bike routes and restaurants. Visit in autumn, just as the leaves are turning, and you'll find 'fall colours' to rival New England's. *visitwales.com*

What to do

Of the many peaks in this area, Snowdon is the one that really calls out to be scaled. There are several hiking routes to the summit (the Miners' Track is perhaps the most picturesque) but the narrow-gauge Snowdon Mountain Railway will take the weight off your feet. *snowdonrailway.co.uk*

Where to eat

On the southern edge of the national park, restaurant-with-rooms Ynyshir serves a fine-dining menu that celebrates Wales' landscape and changes with the seasons. Look out for local ingredients including Welsh wagyu beef. *ynyshir.co.uk*

Where to stay

Betws-y-Coed, in northeast Snowdonia, is an ideal base for outdoor adventures. Upstairs in the town's train station are five Alpine Apartments, which aren't just eccentric in location — expect brash colours and one-off artworks. One-bed flats from £450 a week, self-catering. *betwsaccommodation.co.uk*

WE LIKE

Purple Moose Brewery made its first ale in 2005, and has become so popular it even has its own merch. Tour the brewery in Porthmadog, where the beers are made with Welsh mountain water. *purplemoose.co.uk*

DON'T MISS

Pembrokeshire may be Wales' coasteering capital, but Snowdonia is canyoning country. Climb, scramble, jump and swim in a river gorge with the National White Water Centre — or try paddling the rapids of the Tryweryn river instead. *nationalwhitewatercentre.co.uk*

WORDS: NICOLA TRUP. IMAGES: GETTY

The historic Hotel Corona D'Oro is located in the heart of Bologna. The quiet position, just few steps from the Major Square and the two Towers, allows to better enjoy the city center and its medieval architectural character and the excellence of its food and wine tradition.

The elegant Liberty Lobby with Art Nouveau stuccos has a bright glass dome that makes the space unique and charming and it is the ideal location to relax and taste a fresh drink after a walking tour or a business day.

All 40 rooms (3 prestigious Suites with original frescoes of the Renaissance time) have refined furnishings that contribute to create an enveloping and sumptuous atmosphere, expression of the constant attention to details that characterizes the style of the hotel.

Hotel Corona D'Oro ★★★★Ⓢ
Via Oberdan 12, 40126 Bologna
+39 051 7457611 corona@hco.it
www.hco.it

HCO
1890

HOTEL CORONA D'ORO

The Word

BACK TO SCHOOL

Didn't tick off enough titles over the summer break? Swot up on our recommended reading list for the new season

For a read loaded with seasonal atmosphere, try Pico Iyer's *Autumn Light: Japan's Season of Fire and Farewells* (RRP: £20, Bloomsbury). The travel writer's latest homage to Japan — his adopted country — is a poetic work of pathetic fallacy where the fiery season's fading landscapes echo the life stories of the people he meets. The travelogue picks up with the passing of his Japanese father-in-law, and follows those he's left behind, many in the autumn of their years. Iyer explores their daily routines, which while pedestrian, are imbued with ancient tradition, superstition and informed by distinct Japanese seasons. It's a tender meditation on both Japanese culture and the impermanence of life.

Equally slow moving, if bristling with vitality, Tom Chesshyre's new book *Slow Trains to Venice: A Love Letter to Europe* (RRP: £16.99, Summersdale), is a joyfully rudderless romp through Europe's railway system. It's the sort of journey we all pledge to do — no set plans or end point — but don't have the nerve or annual leave to master. Chesshyre shows us how, following a path though France (despite inevitable rail strikes), Belgium and onwards east as far as Odessa on the Black Sea, then back again via Central Europe. It's a work of brilliant geekery, but for the most part it's a love letter to the continent, a Eurocentric work for our Brexit-beleaguered times.

Finally, if you prefer your reads to be edifying but epigrammatic, try *Tales of Two Londons: Stories from a Fractured City* (edited by Claire Armitstead, RRP: £9.99, Arcadia): an anthology of short stories, reportage and poetry. Tales from 40 contributors as diverse a Jon Snow, Michèle Roberts and Arifa Akbar, along with previously unpublished writers, immigrants and refugees, paint a picture of the capital that illustrates its driving diversity. **SARAH BARRELL**

HOME SCHOOL: THE BEST BRITISH TRAVEL BOOKS

RELIGIOUS STUDIES
Britain has more than 100 cathedrals, and Christopher Somerville travels their realms in *The Private Life of Britain's Cathedrals*, discovering stories of heathens, rogue saints, passionate believers, architects and archaeologists. RRP: £20 (Doubleday).

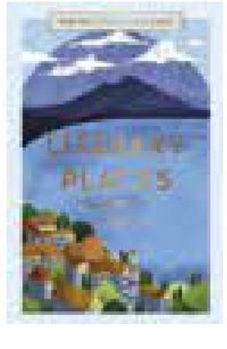
GEOGRAPHY
Utterly Unmissable Britain, as curated by adventure author Richard Madden, takes in remote nature reserves and Spitfire flights, Anglo-Saxon burial sites and royal palaces, foraging spots, clifftop theatres, and much more. RRP: £12.99 (National Trust)

P.E.
In *Adventures Around the Edge of Britain's Hidden Islands*, Lisa Drewe checks out 50 of our little-known islets for a spot of coasteering, camping, wild swimming, whale spotting, kayaking, with glossy photography, maps and suggested routes. RRP: £16.99 (Wild Things Publishing)

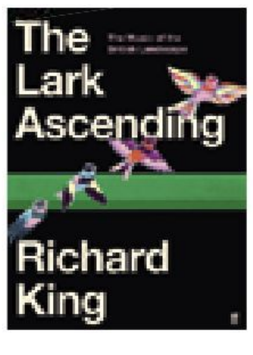
HISTORY
Caroline Crampton's *Forgotten Histories of the Thames Estuary* traces the course of England's longest river to reveal how the waterway helped shape our nation, finding epic feats of Victorian engineering, artist retreats, shipwrecks, old trade routes and wild riverbanks along the way. RRP: £16.99 (Granta)

WISE WORDS: ODES TO A LANDSCAPE

MUD AND STARS
Sarah Wheeler delves into the vast Russian landscape, both literal and emotional, with the likes of Pushkin, Tolstoy, Chekhov as her guides. RRP: £20 (Jonathan Cape)



LITERARY PLACES
Dreamily illustrated by Amy Grimes, Sarah Baxter's literary tour calls at storied spots including Arundhati Roy's Kerala and Victor Hugo's Paris. RRP: £14.99 (White Lion)



THE LARK ASCENDING
From Vaughan Williams to Kate Bush and beyond, Richard King explores the history of the British countryside through its music. RRP: £8.99 (Faber)

IMAGE: GETTY

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Win A FOUR-NIGHT TRIP TO SEE THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

[*National Geographic Traveller* (UK) has teamed up with The Aurora Zone, the UK's original Northern Lights holiday company, to offer a thrilling autumn adventure in Finland]

The experience

Home to around 200,000 reindeer and 180,000 people as well as six national parks, Finnish Lapland is a true off-grid wilderness with minimal light pollution. The trip on offer is based in Inari, high above the Arctic Circle; a region with an exceptional record for glimpsing the Northern Lights. Inari is a small lakeside village within Finnish Lapland's natural playground and home to the indigenous Sámi culture. Each autumn, the leaves turn a vibrant gold and the locals call this peak of autumn colour 'ruska'.

Autumn is a particularly special time to visit for aurora hunting with its clear night skies and unfrozen lakes, meaning there's a good chance to see the ethereal lights reflected on water. Scientific research also confirms that the weeks around the annual autumn equinox in September are often the best time for observing the aurora. This is due to increased geomagnetic activity darkening skies in the auroral zone coupled with reduced cloud cover.

Accommodation is at the lakeside Wilderness Hotel Inari which is a stylish and contemporary property offering a variety of hotel room accommodation, aurora cabins and cosy log cabins. Delicious seasonal cuisine is served in the restaurant and guests can relax beside roaring log fires or warm up in the glass-roofed sauna.

The prize

Courtesy of The Aurora Zone, the winner and a guest will enjoy a four-night trip to Finnish Lapland, including return flights from London to Ivalo (via Helsinki), local airport transfers and four nights' full-board accommodation at the Wilderness Hotel Inari (twin/double room). The prize also includes a Northern Lights presentation, two aurora camps, an educational Sámi Siida Museum visit, an aurora hunt by minibus/car and a guided nature walk. Cold weather clothing for the duration of the trip, an aurora alert service and expert guiding is also included. *theaurorazone.com*

AURORA ZONE

THE BRIGHTEST WAY TO SEE THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

TO ENTER

Answer the following question online at *nationalgeographic.co.uk/competitions*

What's the Finns' local term for autumn colour?

Competition closes on 30 September 2019. The winner must be a resident of the UK & Ireland aged 18 & over. Full T&Cs at *nationalgeographic.co.uk/competitions*.

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TRAVEL WRITING

PITCH PERFECT: From learning how to be persistent yet polite, to timing, tone and getting noticed, our panel reveals their top strategies when it comes to pitching.

SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR A TRAVEL WRITER: With so many new platforms and formats, there's never been a better time to make your words count. Our panellists explain how to make ends meet as a travel writer.

TRAVEL WRITING 2.0: Quick-access content may define our age, but where does travel writing sit in the era of entertainment immediacy? We debate the art of travel writing and its future.

PHOTOGRAPHY

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED: We delve into planning a shoot, offering insider tips on how to adapt to any environment and how to get the most from your images.

WILD CARD: Whether it's whales or wolves, learn how to get up close and personal with all sorts of animals on land or on sea, as we explain how to capture that once-in-a-lifetime shot.

LANDSCAPE KNOW-HOW: Looking to improve your landscape photography skills? Find out how to get the best from your surroundings when you're in the elements, no matter what the weather throws at you.

WHEN: 6 October 2019, 10.00-18.00
WHERE: University of Westminster, Marylebone Road, London NW1 5LS
TICKETS: £50 or two for £90

IMAGES: GETTY

Latin American food featuring Peruvian gastronomy

Where can you find the best ceviche in Lima? What's the best red wine with a prime Argentinean steak? Is there a secret to making the perfect mole sauce? Whatever your Latin American culinary query, our panel — which will include the acclaimed chef and restaurateur Martin Morales; and award-winning photographer and travel writer Nori Jemil — will have the answer. Come along and find out where to go and what to eat and drink from the experts who know this mouth-watering cuisine inside out.

WHEN: 10 September, 18.00-19.00
WHERE: Wallacespace Clerkenwell, 18 Clerkenwell Green, London EC1R 0DP
TICKETS: £10, which includes a drink and some nibbles

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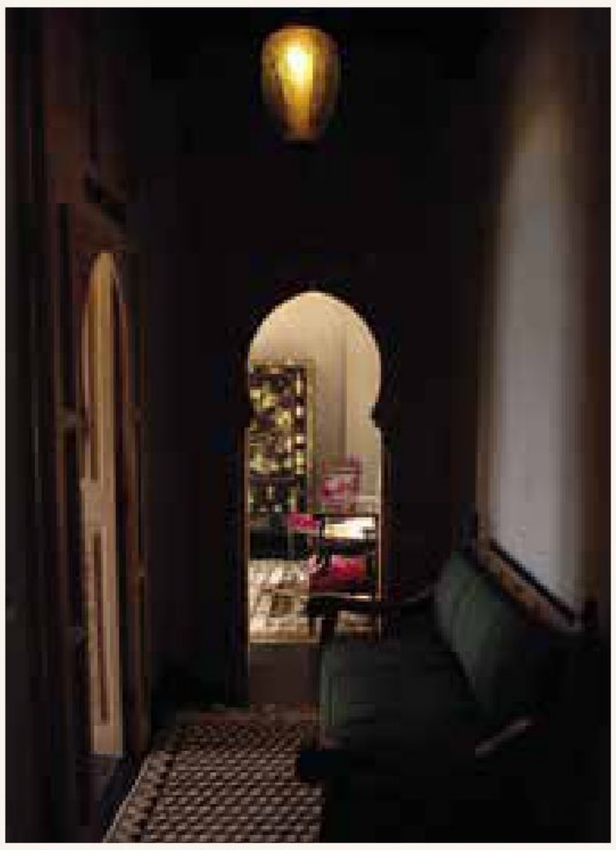
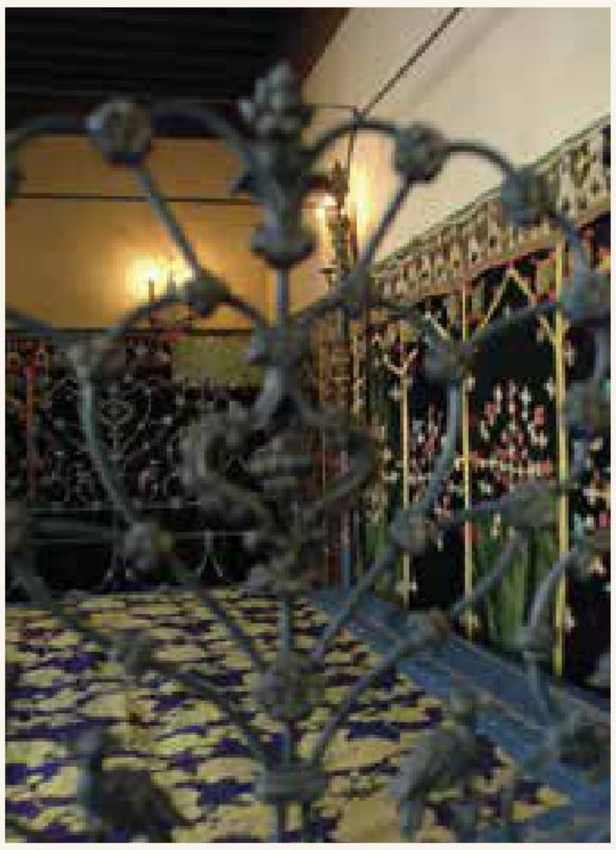
FOR MORE INFO AND TICKETS, HEAD TO NATIONALGEOGRAPHIC.CO.UK/EVENTS

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From the terraces of the hotel, you will feel you are sailing on a boat,
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NOTES FROM AN AUTHOR // CHRISTINE MANGAN

TANGIER

The Moroccan port may have changed since its heyday, but the allure that first drew artists and writers here still hangs heavy in the streets

Stepping off the ferry, we descended into chaos. Droves of insistent hawkers stood before my partner and me, offering sunglasses, hats and watches, along with a bevy of other trinkets, concealed within sleeves or underneath coats. We pushed in the direction of the Medina, the sun beating down overhead, only to be met with a younger set of touts who flanked us on either side, promising to show us around the city for only a small price. No, we responded, and then *non, merci*, and at last, *la choukran*. They didn't listen. Instead, down one winding street and then another, they continued to swarm around us. It was a scene I'd read about in numerous travelogues, although no amount of research could have prepared me for the real thing.

I'd always been enthralled by stories of Tangier, the Moroccan port city often defined by its literary past. It was the reason that, with only weeks left on our visas, our four-year stay in Dublin coming to an end, my partner and I decided to embark on one final adventure, in pursuit of the city that had served as a source of inspiration to generations of writers.

There remain its detractors, of course. Recent travellers lament that the city has changed since the time when writers like Paul Bowles and William Burroughs, Patricia Highsmith and Truman Capote, flocked to its shores. They claim that this particular chapter of Tangier's story is well and truly in the past.

And indeed, we stumbled across a number of locals eager to reminisce about the days of the 'golden age'; one man even taking out a scrapbook to show us the well-known names the city once drew, his favourite picture a yellowed newspaper clipping of himself and Sidney Poitier.

Of our more memorable encounters was the time when one of the city's infamous grifters — although to us he was only ever an affable conversationalist — sat next to us at the cafe in the Cinema Rif, lit a cigarette and introduced himself. He claimed to be an artist and talk quickly turned to the writers who'd once lived in the city. He wanted to know if I'd ever read Bowles and when I admitted I hadn't, he shook his head in disappointment. He spoke reverently of the author, telling us with a certain amount of pride that Bowles had once been his neighbour; that they'd wave to one another in the morning; that everyone thought of the writer as just another resident of Tangier. He made us promise to visit Café Hafa, once frequented by Bowles and where all the artists still go, to drink mint tea and look out towards where the Mediterranean meets the Atlantic.

ILLUSTRATION: JACQUI OAKLEY

While the Interzone no longer existed around Tangier, the spirit of that time could still be found and felt in certain corners of the city. Corners where, despite the progression of time, Tangier had retained something of its mythologised past

At the end of our conversation, as he gathered his things and thanked us for listening to an old man reminisce, as he implored us to pick up a copy of Bowles' work before we left, he smiled and said: "You're Tangerines now."

A quick search later revealed it was the term locals used to describe expats who'd made Tangier their home. I didn't know it then, but it would also become the title of my first novel, the first words of which I'd be inspired to write as we boarded the ferry back to Spain.

Later that night, as we walked through the streets of the Medina, I grew convinced those critics were wrong. While the Interzone (an area governed by foreign powers from 1924-1956) no longer existed around Tangier, the spirit of that time could still be found and felt in certain corners of the city. Corners where, despite the progression of time, Tangier had retained something of its mythologised past.

Whether people-watching over a cafe au lait in the Petit Socco, gazing at the Mediterranean from Café Hafa, or even those experiences that didn't exist during its heyday — sitting atop the white washed terrace of Le Salon Bleu, or listening to the Arab-Andalusian sounds of Les Fils du Détroit — there remained a sense of what initially drew these artists here, and what draws them today.

I've visited Tangier three times now, and while I've come to accept the city may never be as it once was, there's something that sets it apart from all the other places I've visited. Something that prompted me to put pen to paper, to try and capture, as many others have before, what it is about this city that continues to enthrall.

Tangerine by Christine Mangan is published by Little, Brown Book Group. RRP: £8.99

VIEW FROM THE USA // AARON MILLAR

ICE IN HIS VEINS

Set in remote Alaska, Sheldon Chalet is a fitting tribute to an aviation hero who was at home here in America's 'Last Frontier'

Don Sheldon was a true Alaskan legend. He arrived here in 1939 from the plains of Wyoming with nothing but a few dollars in his pocket and dreams of wild country in his eyes. It was a journey many had made before: first in search of gold, then oil. Don's story is one of grit and determination; a call to the wild and to the heartbeat of America's northernmost state.

It's a call I've felt too. Alaska is a humbling place, a land of vast empty spaces that will swallow you whole. To see it from the ground, or on a cruise, as most people do, is spectacular; but from the air, it's revelatory.

That's what Don wanted. After the Second World War — during which he'd flown B-17 bombers — Don set up the Talkeetna Air Service to ferry cargo and people across this emerging annexe of America (Alaska didn't officially become a state until 1959). It was here, in the 49th state of the Union, that his legend was born.

Don was to aviation what Cristiano Ronaldo is to free kicks: he didn't just make it look easy, he made it look good. Over the next 27 years, from 1947 until his death in 1975, Don would pioneer glacier landings — a highly dangerous manoeuvre that enabled him to access remote mountain locations where few others dared to venture. His missions helped survey the entire Alaska Range, including North America's tallest peak, Denali. He also saved the lives of dozens of stranded climbers, often at great personal risk. Unbelievably, in 1950, Don even survived a Hollywood-style plane crash, in which he plummeted nose-first into a freezing lake, swam his unconscious co-pilot to the bank, covered him in moss to keep him warm and then ran, injured, for 50 miles through grizzly bear country to get help.

Don's adventurous spirit lives on; in honour of the man himself, Sheldon Chalet was built by Don's son and daughter, Robert and Kate, and Robert's wife, Marne — developing an idea originally mooted by Don himself. The result is quite possibly the most extreme hotel in the world. It sits on a rocky outcrop hundreds of feet above the Ruth Glacier, over 50 miles from the nearest town. It's accessible only by helicopter and surrounded on all sides by the highest peaks of the Alaska Range, including 20,310ft Denali itself. The five-room chalet makes most billionaires' ski lodges look like mere snow sheds.

It is, without a doubt, the most amazing — and preposterous — place I've ever stayed. I woke with the sun rising over a near-perfect circle of jagged peaks, which surround the chalet on all sides, and closed my eyes to the flickering swathes of the Northern Lights. In the day, I skied the Ruth Glacier and went caving in neon-blue crevasses. At night, I ate seafood platters and had saunas in surely the most extreme, and extravagant, spa in the world — looking through a porthole window at the east face of Denali. For four days, I felt like a combination of Edmund Hillary and Jay-Z — part rugged, summit-slaying mountaineer, part pampered, A-List royalty.

But Sheldon Chalet's most alluring quality isn't its luxury. Don found this spot in the 1950s, while surveying the Alaska Range, built a small mountaineer cabin on the ridge, which still stands to this day behind the main chalet. People thought he was crazy — there was next to nothing to grow, fish or hunt out here in the wintry wilds — but he had a vision. He knew people would come to this remote spot for the mountains; they'd come for the emptiness and silence and the sparkling snow drifting across the high peaks. They'd be called to the wild, just as he'd been.

Sadly, Don died before he could see it, but he was right. Sheldon Chalet may be the most ludicrous hotel in the world, but it's also one of the most humbling. Here, miles from civilisation, surrounded by glaciers, storms and the foreboding shadows of the country's highest peaks, it's impossible not to hear that siren call.

"It's about reverence," Robert told me during my stay. Indeed, that's what Alaska's all about — understanding how the mountains humble us all. Don would have been proud. *sheldonchalet.com*

British travel writer Aaron Millar ran away from London in 2013 and has been hiding out in Boulder, Colorado ever since. *@AaronMWriter*

ILLUSTRATION: JACQUI OAKLEY

THE THEATER OF IS A

The world is a theater, where the acts include trips to its highest peaks like Everest or Kilimanjaro,
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WHAT'S ONLINE

WHAT TO DO IN UBUD

As part of our new monthly guide series, we're going to be bringing you practical guides to use on your travels. This month, we're kicking things off with what you should do in Ubud. WORDS: Stephanie Cavagnaro

Why go?

Beyond the Kuta Beach area — aka party central — and the surfer-chic Canggu coast, you'll find a wilder, history-steeped side to Bali if you head inland, where crumbling temples date to the ninth century, cheeky macaques swing through forest canopies and terraced rice paddies interrupt jungle-wrapped hillsides. Ubud channels its deep spirituality and connection to nature by catering to the wellness-seeking crowd. There are shops selling eco-friendly threads to wear on the mat, health food emporiums, raw food cafes and serene shalas welcoming all levels of yogi. After all, Ubud gets its name from the ancient Balinese word for 'medicine' — come here, and you'll feel better in no time.

READ THE FULL GUIDE ONLINE
NATIONALGEOGRAPHIC.CO.UK/TRAVEL

NEW ON THE SITE

Here's what you have to look forward to on the website this month

Q&A
Meet the MasterChef: Monica Galetti
We talk food heroes and how her heritage influences her menus

UK
What to do in Bloxham
The pretty rural village of Bloxham is a great gateway to the rolling green Cotswolds

SAFARI
Meet the safari guides
Three guides share their stories of the wild, along with top tips for your safari trip

BUDAPEST'S FOODIE CORNERS

From casual canteens to Michelin-starred restaurants, the Hungarian capital is full of places to dine out. We check out the best neighbourhoods. WORDS: Steve Fallon

Budapest is a city that rewards wanderers. Natural beauty and elaborate architecture abound, whether you find yourself up in the Buda Hills, strolling along Pest's riverside promenade or standing on one of the nine bridges that span the mighty River Danube. And eating out is the perfect way to punctuate a day's exploring. With the culinary scene in the Hungarian capital having blossomed in recent years, there's a seemingly endless assortment of dining spots to discover — everything from renovated markets and food trucks to neighbourhood bistros and Michelin-starred restaurants. The gastronomic revolution can be felt across Budapest, but especially so in the Jewish Quarter of the Erzsébetváros district; in the area around St Stephen's Basilica and Szabadság tér (Liberty Square) in Pest; and along south Buda's long boulevard, Bartók Béla út.

READ THE FULL COLUMN ONLINE NOW

IMAGES: GETTY

BEYOND THE TRAVEL SECTION

I SPACE I

The Moon landing at 50
The legacy of the first mission to the Moon is inspiring a new generation. In the July issue, National Geographic celebrated a new age of space exploration

I ENVIRONMENT I

What does the melting ice mean for Arctic whales?
As sea ice vanishes, so do the fatty algae that live in it. They're a critical part of a food chain that runs from plankton to whales

I ANIMALS I

Why are we afraid of sharks?
Sharks aren't the mindless killers we've made them out to be. Where did our fear of sharks come from, and how far back does it go?

FOOD
Eat & Stay: Saffron, Philippines
This restaurant's Saturday seafood grill buffet is exceptional

ITALY
City style: The best design spots in Milan
Here's where to get your design fix in the chic Italian metropolis

MALAWI
Tales from the ferry: Taking a trip across Lake Malawi
The natural wonder is best explored on the *MV Ilala* ferry

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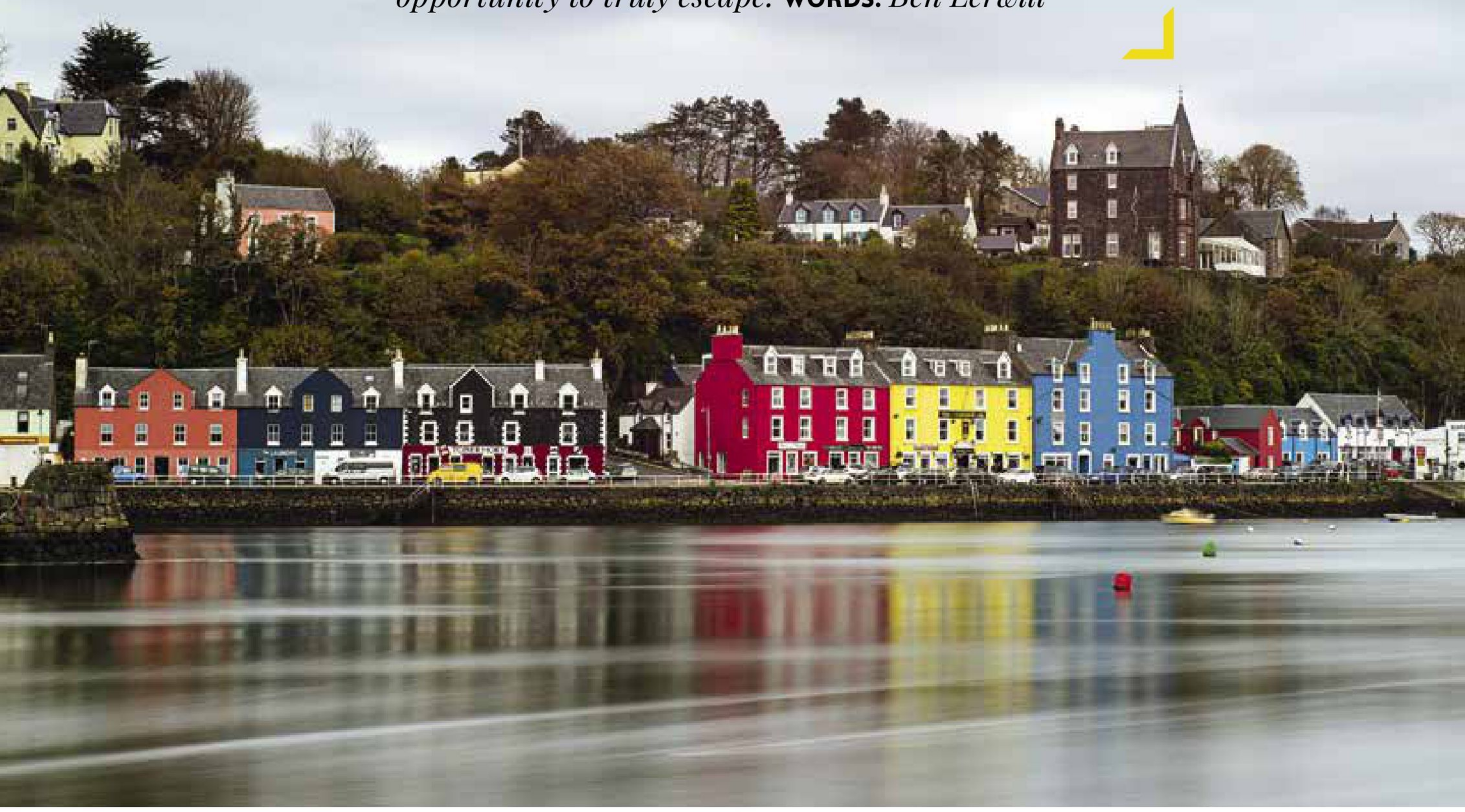
Weekender

ISLE OF MULL

Although just off the Scottish mainland, the Hebridean island of Mull can feel lightyears away — and its fiercely beautiful coastline and rugged highlands provide ample opportunity to truly escape. **WORDS:** *Ben Lerwill*



On paper, the crossing to the Isle of Mull is a simple journey — a 45-minute car ferry ride from Oban, on Scotland's west coast, to the small island port of Craignure. In practice, it's more than that. The world slows a little. The skies expand. Part-way through the crossing, a sea loch furls out to the north and the hills and ridges of Mull come into focus ahead. The British mainland recedes. In more ways than one, the ferry transports you.

Mull is the second-biggest island in the Inner Hebrides, sitting some 30 miles south of the larger, and more visited, Isle of Skye. Its coastline is fiercely beautiful — a world of wild inlets, soft beaches and otter-patrolled bays — and its highlands swell up to above 3,000ft, eulogised by hikers and overflown by eagles. On a fine day, and even on a grey one, Glasgow feels a long way away.

The most obvious focal point is Tobermory, Mull's tiny but charming 'capital', where a row of gaily painted buildings — several of them pubs — frame a handsome natural harbour. As a result, many visitors see only the northern coastal road between Craignure and Tobermory, which means missing out on a vast part of what makes Mull so magical.

Head further south and the rewards are huge. The roads narrow, the phone reception vanishes and the landscapes broaden. There are castles, cafes, galleries and gardens, but the backdrops dwarf the lot. Some of the views around the Treshnish peninsula and the Ross of Mull are as sweeping and spectacular as you'll find anywhere in the UK.

A trip here, however, is about more than just Mull itself. It would be a crying shame not to include Iona, the low-lying island off Mull's southwestern edge, and the uninhabited islet of Staffa, which moved Mendelssohn to write an overture in its honour. Mull and its surrounding islands are full of evocative human stories — not least the 18th- and 19th-century Highland Clearances, which saw the local population forcibly evicted by landowners — but the overriding motif of any visit lies in the work of Mother Nature.

IMAGES: GETTY; ALAMY

For the eagle-eyed

The white-tailed sea eagle, often referred to as a 'flying barn door' thanks to its eight-foot wing span, is the UK's largest bird of prey. The species disappeared from Scotland around 100 years ago but has since been successfully reintroduced. Join Mull Eagle Watch, a non-profit venture, to within binocular-distance of a nest, explaining the eagles' habits and showing what makes the birds so renowned among wildlife-lovers. Book in advance. Runs from April to September. *mulleaglewatch.com*

Hit the town

Wander the brightly hued harbourfront, then follow the woodland trail into nearby Aros Park, before returning to town. Eat at one of the pubs or tuck into battered scallops and chips from the waterside fish and chip van. Looking for a place to bed down? On the slopes above town, Strongarbh House is an elegant four-room hotel with a library full of art books and a tempting selection of single malts. *strongarbh.com*

Walks of art

The sheltered beach at Calgary is among the most popular spots on the island — but there's more to admire than its pale sands. Calgary Art in Nature is an outdoor installation of locally inspired artworks, designed to create a thought-provoking walking tour with fantastic views. *calgary.co.uk/art*

LEFT: Tobermory, Mull
RIGHT, FROM TOP: White-tailed sea eagle; rope sculpture at Calgary Art in Nature; walking group on the summit of Ben More, Mull

TAKE A HIKE

1

TRESHNISH COASTAL CIRCULAR

Regularly described as Mull's most scenic coastal walk, this four-hour circular trail winds around part of the Treshnish peninsula, passing old crofters' villages and a cave once used for making whisky. You'll find parking at the side of the B8073, a couple of miles from Calgary Beach.

2

BEN MORE

The only Munro (a Scottish mountain over 3000ft) outside of Skye and the mainland, and the highest point on Mull, Ben More is unique in that any ascent has to start from sea level. The simplest route is an up-and-down from Loch na Keal, but hardy hikers will enjoy the scramble up A'Chioch ridge.

3

CARSAIG ARCHES

This wonderfully secluded six-hour route begins at Carsaig Pier, leading you beneath tall sea cliffs on the island's south coast and finishing at a pair of impressive natural arches. Expect wildlife sightings and take care on the exposed section between the two arches.

EYEWITNESS

THE WILD ISLES

When porpoises appear over breakfast, you know it's going to be a good day. I'm tackling a plate of smoked trout and scrambled eggs at the enjoyably unpretentious Argyll Hotel, on the Isle of Iona, when I look towards the water and spot three porpoises, their dark backs gleaming. Beyond them lies Mull, washed in sunshine. The animals swim slowly, taking their time. They have the right idea.

People have been making the pilgrimage from Mull to Iona for close to 1,500 years, ever since an Irish missionary — now known as St Columba — arrived in AD 563 and used the island as a base from which to spread Christianity across Scotland. The island's abbey, built on the site of St Columba's monastery, continues to draw pilgrims. On my first night here, I follow a pub tip and end up at a 9pm service. There are chants, candles and Celtic crosses. It's stirring stuff.

Iona by day is no less meditative. I walk out to the broad sands known as the Bay at the Back of the Ocean, where eider ducks are my only company. I spend an hour wandering out to the remote beach at St Columba's Bay, where the waves roll in off the Atlantic and oystercatchers quickstep on the shore. And I climb the grassy hill of Dun I, where the sunset views are shared with a herd of stoic sheep and the 'crek-crek' rattle of corncrakes.

The next day, I board a small boat heading out to Staffa, a striking little island jutting out of the sea on hexagonal basalt columns. We pass a colony of seals, lying fat and placid on rocks, then follow a trail up to the clifftops. Puffins are fussing around in their dozens. "They like humans," says the boat captain, explaining why the birds are happy to waddle by just feet away. "The gulls and skuas clear off when we're around."

The region's wildlife generally does the opposite of clearing off. Back on Mull, I watch a golden eagle soaring above the hills, its fanned wings outstretched. Wild goats stare from under curved horns; great northern divers shape and shimmy offshore; wheatears and herons appear almost everywhere I go.

The best moment of all is when I drive along the road leading from Loch Beg to Salen. In the honeyed light of late afternoon, the views are near-celestial, and I pull over to gaze at the quiet hills and bays. The evening is still — all greens, golds and blues — and, as if on cue, an otter emerges, brown fur spiked and wet. For 10 minutes I watch it dive and feed, the water rippling as the day dissolves. Mull shivers with life — and it knows how to conjure moments that stay with you.

Macs Adventure offers a seven-night 'Walking & Wildlife on Mull and Iona' package from £755 per person, including ferry crossings, a guidebook and B&B accommodation throughout, with three nights on Iona and four on Mull. Package available between March and October. *macsadventure.com*
visitscotland.com

I board a small boat heading out to Staffa. We pass a colony of seals, lying fat and placid on rocks, then follow a trail up to the clifftops. Puffins are fussing around in their dozens

IMAGE: VISITSCOTLAND/PAUL TOMKINS

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Eat

CORSICA

The French island makes good use of its unique location when it comes to gastronomy — whether it's through its Italian history; rich, fertile terroir; or fine seafood from its rich Mediterranean waters. Words: Audrey Gillan

"The sea and the mountains. Rivers and hills and the '*maquis*'. In Corsica, we have all these across a small island and this means we have some of the best produce in the world — it's just that we didn't recognise it before," says Nicolas Stromboni.

The author and wine merchant is giving me a crash course in the gastronomy of the Mediterranean island that lies southeast of France and just north of Sardinia. "You can have sea urchins, charcuterie, veal and wild boar all on the same table, none of it having come from very far away," he says.

His book, *Du Pain, Du Vins, Des Oursins* ('bread, wine, sea urchins', but less lyrically titled *Corsica: The Recipes* in English) is an ode to the foods of this small, sparsely populated, wild land.

"I don't think there's another area in the world with such small topography, but with such diverse product," says Nicolas. "Corsica is the biggest gastronomical producer in France in terms of 'family' of produce — we have 34 'families', such as cured meat, cheese and wine. It's like France in microcosm."

The *maquis*, or shrubland, that Nicolas talks about blankets almost half the island and is covered in the wild herbs and aromatic flowers that flavour much of the local cooking and give Corsica the nickname 'the scented isle'. Thyme, oregano, myrtle and nepeta, an indigenous mint, as well as immortelle, a deeply fragrant curry plant, are among the shrubs that grow here. But when I first meet Nicolas, it's the scent of pork that fills the air. He's deftly charring pungent cuts of meat on the barbecue. "Here we have a little black pig that's incredibly tasty because it eats just three things — whey, hops and chestnuts," he says.

The feast Nicolas is cooking marks the opening of the annual Art'è Gustu food festival, held in a school playground in the town of Aléria. It's curated and hosted by Valérie Hermé, wife of the high priest of macarons, Pierre, and attracts culinary pilgrims and chefs from the French mainland and beyond.

"I met Valerie six years ago at this festival and fell in love — both with her and this island, her home," Pierre tells me.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Sea urchins; chevre cheese; Sainte-Lucie-de-Tallano; Nicolas Stromboni; clementines

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"The *maquis* herbs are very special: for me, it's immortelle and nepeta, so very distinctive, the smell of Corsica. The pork here is astonishingly good, too; the meat and the fat are so densely flavoured. And the Corsicans make the best candied fruits in the world. This is a land of produce."

As I wander from stall to stall, I begin to understand what Nicolas and Pierre mean when they say they adore Corsican produce. I taste *brocciu* (a creamy whey cheese that's eaten soon after it's made), *canistrelli* (crunchy biscuits), herb pies, *maquis*-scented honey, hazelnuts and wines. There are displays of hand-forged knives, which I come to learn are deeply ingrained in Corsican culture. A pastoral land, knives have long been used here to cut crops, kill animals and eat with — but they were also used to ward off invaders such as the nearby Genoese.

Félix Torre carves slices of his fat-marbled coppa, a single sliver of it persuading me why it's so highly rated by Pierre. Charcuterie is, perhaps, the island's primary product. It's hung to age in the eaves of houses and shops, and on the ceilings of restaurants, its pungency wafting all around. The cuts' Italian-inflected names — *coppa*, *lonzu*, *prisuttu*, *salsiccia*, *vuleta* — speak of Corsica's history of Italian rule before France, but this method of preservation also tells a story of frugality and the seasons, where an animal was slaughtered in winter, but cured so it might be savoured year-round.

High in the Alta Rocca mountains, where stark granite peaks are covered with chestnut, oak and pine trees — chef Jean-Baptiste de Rocca Serra leads me into the curing room at A Pignata, a small inn and restaurant that's been run by his family for generations, and which exalts local produce.

"We keep the old, simple ways alive here. We have 100 pigs on the mountain and from November to March we make charcuterie to serve in the restaurant. It's very special; the animals are free-range and eat chestnuts and acorns, but it's also about the altitude and climate — it all adds to the flavour."

Dinner here at A Pignata begins with a platter of these meats, deep in flavour but sweet too, followed by pork and vegetables grown on the family farm further down the hill. "My cuisine is the cuisine of my grandmother," says Jean-Baptiste. "I cook with a lot of love. It's slow cooking."

BELOW FROM TOP: 'Vendetta' knives for sale on the street; charcuterie, Le Chemin des Vignobles, Ajaccio
RIGHT: Seafood dish, Restaurant Casadelmar

IMAGE: AWL IMAGES

A TASTE OF *Corsica*

RESTAURANT CASADELMAR

Chef Fabio Bragagnolo mixes local produce with that of France and Italy in this chic two Michelin-starred hotel restaurant. On the menu is locally caught red tuna baked in clay and served with buffalo stracciatella and smoked mullet roe; as well as ravioli of minced quail, ricotta cheese, wild nettles and morels served with a smoked consommé. Among the meat dishes are Corsican veal and duck. The four-course 'discovery' menu is around £152.50 per person. *casadelmar.fr/en*

A PIGNATA

This family-run auberge in the mountains of the Alta Rocca uses rustic Corsican techniques and produce grown on a nearby farm. Charcuterie, made from small blackfoot pigs reared on acorns and chestnuts, is a highlight, along with a peasant soup of ham bones, vegetables and pasta. Main courses are simple, often lamb or pork accompanied by rich cannelloni made with creamy brocciu cheese. The dining room has a fire for cold nights and a terrace in the summer. A four-course dinner with cheese is around £47.50 per person. *apignata.com*

LA TABLE DE CALA ROSSA

Chef Pascal Cayeux turns to the Mediterranean and neighbouring Italy to bring a light touch to Corsica's rich larder. Dishes on the set 'epicurean' menu include local langoustine served with figs grown in the garden, almonds and a crustacean consomme; and matcha tea ravioli with brocciu cheese and pigeon roasted in the oven. The four-course epicurean menu, including bread and an amuse-bouche, is around £108 per person. *hotel-calarossa.com*

In the nearby town of Zonza, I meet chef Jacques Sabit at Auberge du Sanglier, a rustic restaurant that specialises in *sanglier* (wild boar). "We don't make fish here because we're in the mountains," he laughs, presenting me with a rich boar stew, dotted with chestnuts and accompanied by handmade pasta.

But on this island, the sea isn't far away. Its siren call leads me down from the peaks, through the salt plains of Porto-Vecchio and to the kitchen of chef Fabio Bragagnolo, at his two Michelin-star restaurant in the newly refurbished Casadelmar Hotel. He takes sea bream and turns it into cannelloni, stuffing it with spider crab and dotting it with caviar; he bakes sea bass in a salt and pastry case, serving it with razorfish; and celebrates his Italian roots and Corsica's proximity to his homeland with a cacio e pepe-style taglioni with tiger prawns. "The seafood here is very special and I want to highlight that," he says.

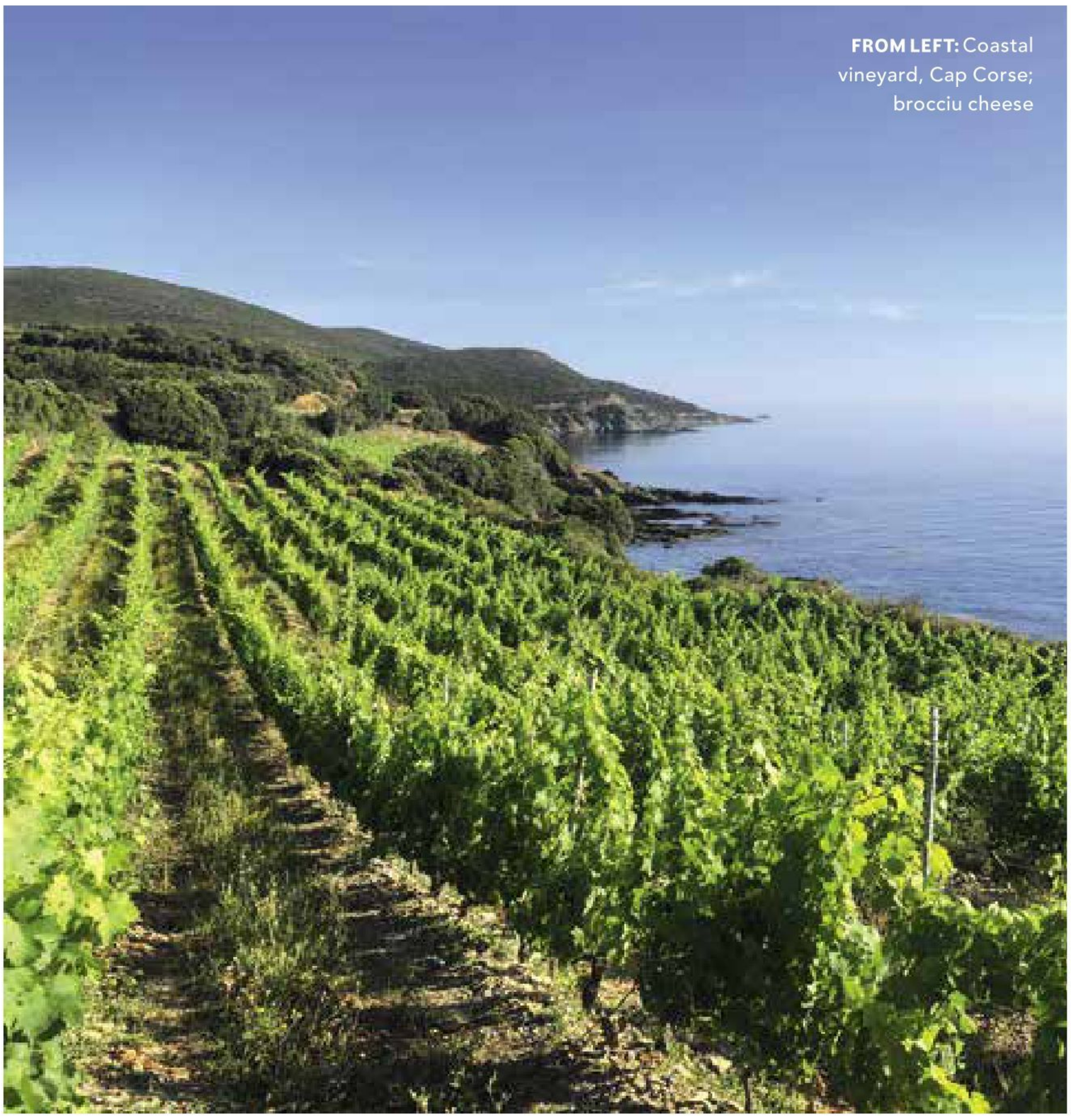
Yet it's standing in the vineyards of Domaine de Torraccia with winemaker Marc Imbert — looking out on a view that takes in the sea and the mountains — that I truly come to understand more about Corsicans' relationship with their land.

"Our winemaking and gastronomy were decimated by the two world wars. We lost a generation of men along with the traditions of viniculture and produce, and it's only over the last couple of decades that we've begun to reclaim that," he explains. "Corsica's topography means we have excellent conditions for winemaking. We have a fruity nature, but the terroir means we have more character and structure in our wine. Everything around you — the *maquis*, the mountains, the sea — adds to the wine."

At Les Aromatiques de l'Ile de Beauté, a wild garden near Porto-Vecchio, I meet horticulturist Stéphane Rogliano, who cultivates the plants of the *maquis* for restaurants across the island. He picks grey fronds of immortelle, and tells me to bruise them with my fingers and inhale the curry-like scent that bursts out. I breathe in varieties of mint, oregano, marjolaine and fennel, everything intensely fragrant.

"I've reclaimed the land for the plants," explains Stéphane. "I leave them to grow like they would in the wild: slowly, with no fertiliser, which means they have more character, smell and flavour."

Corsica's most famous son, Napoleon, was said to crave the scent of the *maquis* and indeed, the aroma lingers long in the memory. When I return home, I plant a window box with immortelle, but it's not the same. I'll just have to return.



FROM LEFT: Coastal vineyard, Cap Corse; brocciu cheese

Five food finds

1

BROCCIU

A creamy, fresh cheese that's eaten on its own, made into cannelloni, baked in pies and turned into desserts.

2

FIGATELLU

The most emblematic of the various cured sausages produced in Corsica, made from pork meat and liver.

3

CAP CORSE MATTEI

A bittersweet aperitif made from Moscato and Vermentino grape juice, and flavoured with *maquis* herbs and other exotic plants.

4

WINE

Three grape varieties, Vermentinu, Nielluccio and Sciacarello, are cultivated in the vineyards between mountain and sea and produce glorious wines.

5

HERBS

The *maquis* yields wild herbs that scent the air and kitchens throughout the island. Immortelle and nepeta are two of the most emblematic.

Air Corsica flies from Stansted to Bastia, Ajaccio, Calvi and Figari from £124 return. Rooms at the Grand Hotel de Cala Rossa, near Porto Vecchio, start from £170. *aircorsica.com hotel-calarossa.com visit-corsica.com*

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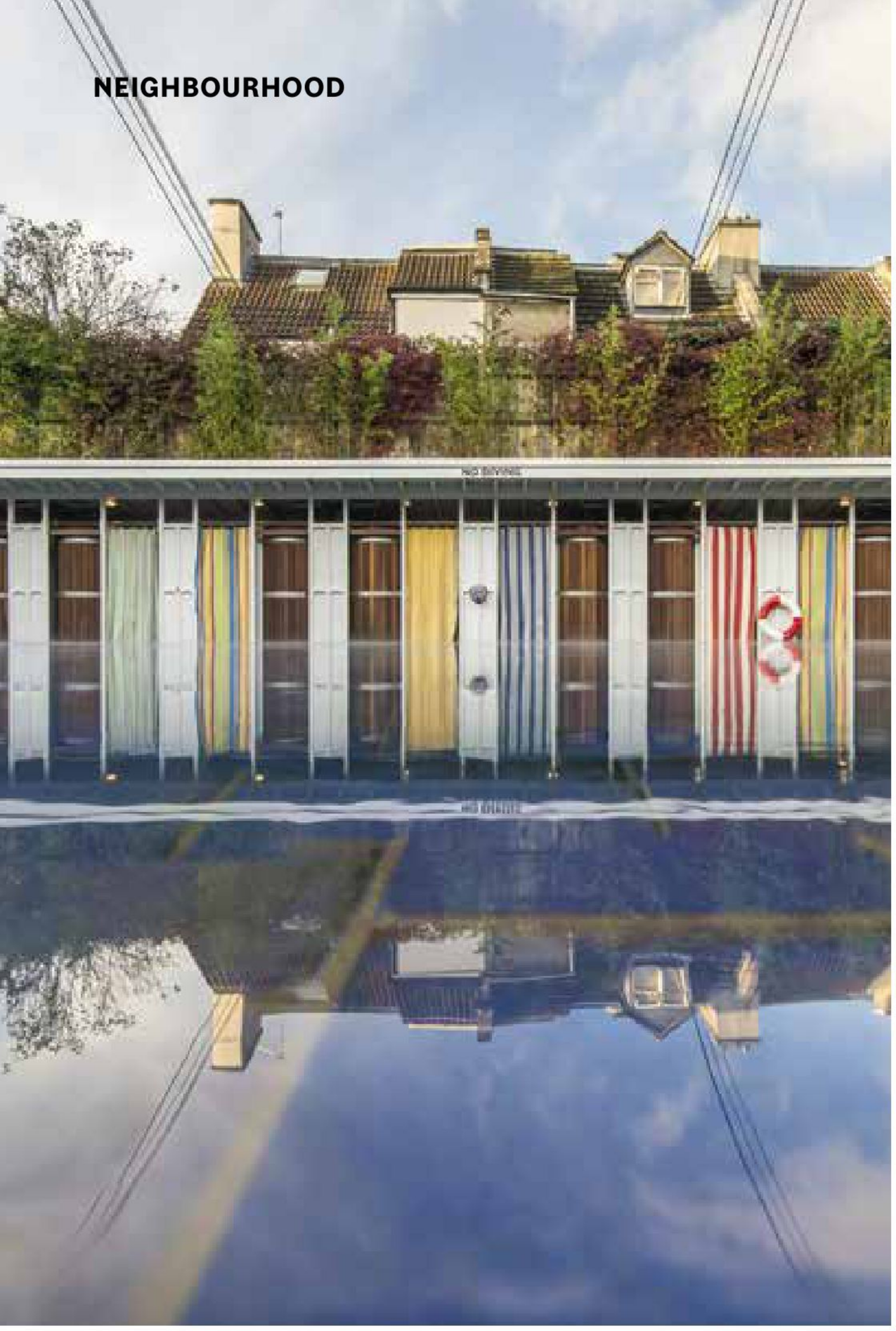
Neighbourhood

BRISTOL

The city with a defiant indie spirit is reinventing its docks and downtown area, forging a link between iconic figures from its past, such as Brunel and Bluebeard, and the edgy creative energy of its present. Words: Sarah Barrell

ILLUSTRATION: KERRY HYNDMAN

The big city in the country, Bristol is green at heart, a place of cycleways, community parks and allotments, with a verdant, eco-conscious attitude to match. Amid the perfectly preserved Georgian terraces and museum-piece treasures of Brunel engineering, visitors will find a graffiti-decked underground dubstep club, a co-op arts space, and a dockside shipping container transformed from functional to fun. Come here to seek out the pioneers of an exciting and eclectic dining scene, spot iconic works by a nation-shaping graffiti artist, and enjoy the briny buzz of harbourside, where one of Europe's largest regeneration projects continues to reshape the city.



Clifton

Word has it Oowee Diner is handing out free burgers, downtown. But I'm up in Clifton Village, Bristol's hilltop Georgian enclave where the city centre's briny buzz seems a world away. Looking down from its cliff-top heights, Clifton has always had a distinct identity; a neighbourhood dominated by its castle-like observatory and Brunel suspension bridge that was once a refuge for those fleeing the dock's din aboard Clifton Rocks Railway, which rattled up the River Avon's steep gorge.

Looming above this defunct 19th-century funicular, the formerly fading Avon Gorge Hotel has been given a new lease of life. The Hotel du Vin brand has applied a decorative defibrillator to the heart of what was once a Georgian spa retreat to rival Bath's. Former pump rooms are reborn as a wine cellar/event space, 78 guest rooms — some with clawfoot baths and reach-out-and-touch bridge and gorge views — display regal blues, earthy greys and whimsical, classical portraiture.

Elsewhere, the pull of Isambard Kingdom Brunel's best-known structure is strong. A blustery walk across its almost impossibly strung length recalls bridges spanning America's mammoth waterways. But there are few more perfectly pleasant English places than Clifton Village, all honey-hewed Bath stone townhouses, where extravagantly furred cats weave through fragrant gardens of foxgloves. It's here I find ANNA Cake Couture, creators of gem-like confections (try a flight of mini 'cubicakes'). Nearby, British Barber Co is a chap's den of red-leather chairs and sandalwood-scented pomades.

Then there's the porticoed perfection of The Ivy Clifton Brasserie, an outpost of the legendary London restaurant, set in an opulent Georgian building. Sit at its soaring mirror-backed bar, sip a Brunel Breeze (a citrusy blend of vodka, passion fruit, lemon and ginger ale), and admire art deco drawings of the ships, trains and bridges that shaped Bristol's industrial past.

The oh-so-civilised ante is upped with a restaurant lunch at Bristol Lido, an open-air pool dating back to 1849. I dine on wood-fired Moorish-Med tapas: charred cauliflower and tahini yoghurt, chorizo, and hand-dived scallops, while swimmers plunge into the pool below.

Exploring the student-trampled Clifton Triangle area, the tranquil spell broken somewhat, I take refuge in another oasis, of sorts: The Coconut Tree, a Sri Lankan street food outfit, where tropical cocktails come in ceramic elephants, the hoppers (coconut-milk pancakes) are killer hot and the DJs unapologetically in holiday mood.

ABOVE FROM LEFT: Bristol Lido; 'Cubicakes' at ANNA Cake Couture
RIGHT: Cargo 1, Wapping Wharf

IMAGES: GETTY; EVOKE PICTURES CORPORATE PHOTOGRAPHY; PHILIP VILE; ALAMY

When in Bristol...

1

BRISTOL OLD VIC

The recent makeover of the English-speaking world's oldest continuously working theatre is a marvel. VR tours bring its long history to life; the interactive Noises Off gallery explores sound effects from Shakespeare to digital tech. *bristololdvic.org.uk*

2

OOWEE DINER

From Montpelier start-up to citywide institution in under three years, Oowee Diner is one of the native mini-franchises that Bristol breeds so well. Dirty burgers include the plant-based Sneaky Clucker. *ooweediner.com*

3

COLSTON HALL

The landmark music venue — named after a 17th-century slave-trading Bristolian — is set to change its name next year, following protests and a boycott from bands, including local outfit Massive Attack. *colstonhall.org*

4

BRISTOL AND BATH RAILWAY PATH

The much-loved greenway — tracing the former Bath-Bristol rail route — is flanked by community allotments, artworks and leafy playgrounds. *bristolbathrailwaypath.org.uk*

5

PIEMINISTER

A Bristol institution, this pie shop chain's hearty, meaty staples now include gluten-free and veggie versions, such as Kevin. This plant-based pie with a ragu filling is named after Kevin Keegan, the former footballer whose surname, handily, rhymes with 'vegan'. *pieminister.co.uk*

Harbourside

From where I'm sitting, I've a seagull's-eye view of St Nicholas Market's glass roof and the tower of ruined St Mary-Le-Port Church. It's a scene unchanged since the 1700s — until I get an eyeful of the gleaming Rocket parked up alongside me on the Astroturfed roof of Brooks Guesthouse Bristol. It's one of four '50s retro-style caravans and makes for a surprisingly comfy, fun stay; a shiny symbol of old Bristol's youthful renaissance.

St Mary-Le-Port represents the city centre's original proximity to the old docks — a closeness that was lost over time when the port's fortunes faded and urban planning turned its back on the quayside. But today, there's once again a sense of connection between docks and downtown — part of an ongoing overhaul that represents one of Europe's largest regeneration projects. From the Statue of Neptune's fountains, which spray Anchor Road west of St Nicholas Market, it's a clear view to the Floating Harbour (aka the historic docks).

Aboard a Bristol Packet Boat Trips' tour, the greatest hits of regeneration glide by. The Arnolfini, a gallery housed in a handsome former tea warehouse that was once a lone beacon of Bristol's waterfront renaissance, is now surrounded by wiggly bridges, flower-filled slipways and cafe-lined boardwalks. Floating bars and music venues revive old barges, and flats fill formerly derelict railway sidings, disused gasworks and the warehouses of Redcliff Backs, once Blackbeard's stomping ground.

There's a shed-load of culture: the Mud Dock cafe/bike shop, the Watershed cinema, and M Shed industrial and maritime museum set in a former transit shed — its collection of towering cranes still cranking over the water, now hauling pleasure riders instead of cargo.

But perhaps the best new attraction is at docks, on the *SS Great Britain*. Brunel's 19th-century steamer features a bonkers-brilliant addition to its already extensive museum that runs from rigging (a chance for some knee-knocking climbing) to hull (preserved in a high-tech dry-dock). The Being Brunel visitor experience (respectfully) recasts the ingenious Victorian engineer as a madcap Willy Wonka character. I take a top hat at the entrance, pop it on and explore his world, riding in a shaking, broad-gauge railway carriage and visiting his recreated docks offices.

A docks day should ideally conclude at Cargo, Wapping Wharf's two-storey retail yard of repurposed shipping containers, where culinary vanguards like Root and Cargo Cantina reign. At Japanese-Scandi cool Kaiju, I'm delivered exemplary izakaya (charred sesame leeks, crispy chicken skins with kimchi) and the silkiest salmon tare. Its big flavours shout in the teeny boxlike space that lacks the grandiosity of Brunel, but certainly channels his inventive spirit.

FROM LEFT: Cocktails at Masa + Mezcal; Breakdancing Jesus, a mural by Cosmo Sarson outside Hamilton House

Stokes Croft

"Bristol venues are particular. They must be plugged into the community — not imposed on it," says Justin Salisbury, founder of Artist Residence, the hotel outfit transforming a derelict former boot factory on Portman Square into a boutique billet. 'Shoebox' rooms, suites, and 200 artworks will fill this Grade I-listed mega-conversion, but Justin is more focused on the ground floor's bar-restaurant-lounge, which he's pegging as a local hangout as much as a hotel.

Justin's illusive formula is Survival 101 in Stokes Croft, an area near the city centre but far left politically. Once grander than Clifton, Bristol's oldest suburb is today more commonly known as the scene of '80s riots, squat parties and after-hours raves. Across the square, basement bar Cosies has been dub techno-testing its Georgian foundations for decades. It's holding firm in the face of developers but go north along graffiti-daubed Upper York Street, and you head into the eye of the gentrification storm. One of the UK's biggest community hubs, Hamilton House — adorned with Banksy's famous Mild Mild West mural — is threatened with private development. Coexist, the co-op that runs this ad-hoc bar/cafe/yoga studio, was recently ousted and tenants are being shown the door.

As well as kitchenware with a punk political aesthetic (Royal Dalton-style teapots with 'Save The NHS' logos, mugs adorned with Corbyn's mug), neighbouring Stokes Croft China does a fine line in preserving community space. A member of local organisation The People's Republic of Stokes Croft, it's currently campaigning to save Turbo Island, a tiny triangle of land at the junction of Jamaica Street that welcomes all-day partiers and uses billboards as an agitprop art gallery.

At Jamaica Street Stores — its double-height ceilings hung with plants in buckets, shelves lined with local handicrafts — lunch is a treat: plates of fried chicken with kimchi mayo, heritage beets with ewe's curd, and Scotch eggs made with Nduja sausage and quail eggs. Its picture windows offer a cinematic view of the Stokes Croft action — complemented by a copy of *The Bristol Cable*, a local freesheet whose HQ is next door. Today's news: landmark venues slated for closure, some — like the bastions of the Croft's music scene, Blue Mountain nightclub, and Star & Garter pub — enjoying temporary reprieves, thanks to local activism.

"Bristol responds well to authentic — I hope we've done that here." says Kieran Waite of his new Stokes' Croft bar Masa + Mezcal. He's done his homework: research trips resulted in its menu of over 60 tequilas, mezcals, raicillas and sotols from small producers across Mexico, while the food — from asado sweet potato, to Baja-style fish tacos — is delicious. Or, as the locals would say: gert lush. A Stokes Croft stayer? Only time will tell.

MORE INFO

Clifton Rocks Railway. *cliftonrocksrailway.org.uk*
Clifton Bridge. *cliftonbridge.org.uk*
ANNA Cake Couture. *thisisanna.co.uk*
British Barber Co. *britishbarbercompany.com*
The Ivy Clifton Brasserie. *theivycliftonbrasserie.com*
Bristol Lido. *lidobristol.com*
The Coconut Tree. *thecoconut-tree.com*
St Nicholas Market. *stnicholasmarketbristol.co.uk*
Bristol Packet Boat Trips. *bristolpacket.co.uk*
Mud Dock. *mud-dock.co.uk*
M Shed. *bristolmuseums.org.uk*
SS Great Britain. ssgreatbritain.org
Cargo. *wappingwharf.co.uk/cargo*
Artist Residence. *artistresidence.co.uk*
Hamilton House. *hamiltonhouse.org*
Stokes Croft. *prsc.org.uk*
The Bristol Cable. *thebristolcable.org*
Jamaica Street Stores. *jamaicastreetstores.com*
Masa + Mezcal. *masaandmezcal.co.uk*

Hotel du Vin has double rooms from £85. *hotelduvin.com*
Brooks GuestHouse Bristol has double rooms from £67 and Rockets to book from £80, both B&B. *brooksguesthousebristol.com*

IMAGE: GETTY

DEWA

PHUKET

DEWA PHUKET (Beach Resort, Villas and Suites) is located a few steps from the stunning Nai Yang beach, and next to the protected Sirinath National Park, on the northwest coast of Phuket island and offering easy access to Phuket Town (30 minutes away). A stylish boutique resort is comprising Private Pool Villas, One- & Two-Bedroom Suites and 56 new Deluxe Rooms to make the ideal holiday resort for everyone.

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Sleep

BANGKOK

Creativity is on full display in the Thai capital and nowhere more so than in its hotels. Whether it's with stylish antique flourishes, retro rooms or minimalist chic, Bangkok has plenty of stylish places to bed down. Words: Lee Cobaj

Tiny heritage houses, chic crash pads, and five-star resorts with lavish spas and helipads: the Thai capital has it all. First-time visitors are well advised to ease into this frenetic city by staying in the relative calm of the Chao Phraya River area, which has begun to attract a steady flow of independent designers, restaurateurs and creative types. Those wishing to be right in the thick of the action should head downtown to where the districts of Siam Si Lom, Chidlom and Ploenchit collide amid a multitude of malls, markets, food courts, restaurants and bars. Alternatively, Thonglor and Chinatown have plenty going on, but offer a more earthy neighbourhood feel, and are well-placed for those wanting to explore Bangkok on public transport.

IMAGE: AWL IMAGES

For affordable romance

£ HOTEL ONCE BANGKOK

Located on a quiet street near the Chao Phraya River, Hotel Once Bangkok is tucked away from the city, yet well placed for exploring some of its biggest attractions. Walk 10 minutes to Asiatique night market, or hop on the free shuttle boat (available at the neighbouring Ramada Plaza by Wyndham Bangkok Menam Riverside) and head to the Grand Palace, Wat Pho Temple, Wat Arun and the new Iconsiam mall, with its Vegas-style fountains and indoor floating market. Drink cocktails at the rooftop bar and afterwards, flop in one of the crisp, minimalist guest rooms, softened by oyster greys, tropical plants and fleecy throws.

ROOMS: Doubles from £90, B&B. *hotelonce.com*

For design buffs

£ BANGKOK PUBLISHING RESIDENCE

This small, smart set-up — housed, as the name suggests, in a former printers — is just a 10-minute walk from the raucous backpacker zone of Khao San Road but feels like it belongs to a bygone era. Its atrium lobby features retro movie posters, vintage desks, battered leather chairs, printing accoutrements and piles of groovy old magazines. Over four floors, the eight retro-styled guest rooms — think antique wooden floors, wrought-iron beds, granny-chic oil paintings — are accessed via a scissor gate elevator. And up top, on the garden terrace, a bar, hot tub and table football await.

ROOMS: Doubles from £82, B&B.
bpresidence.com

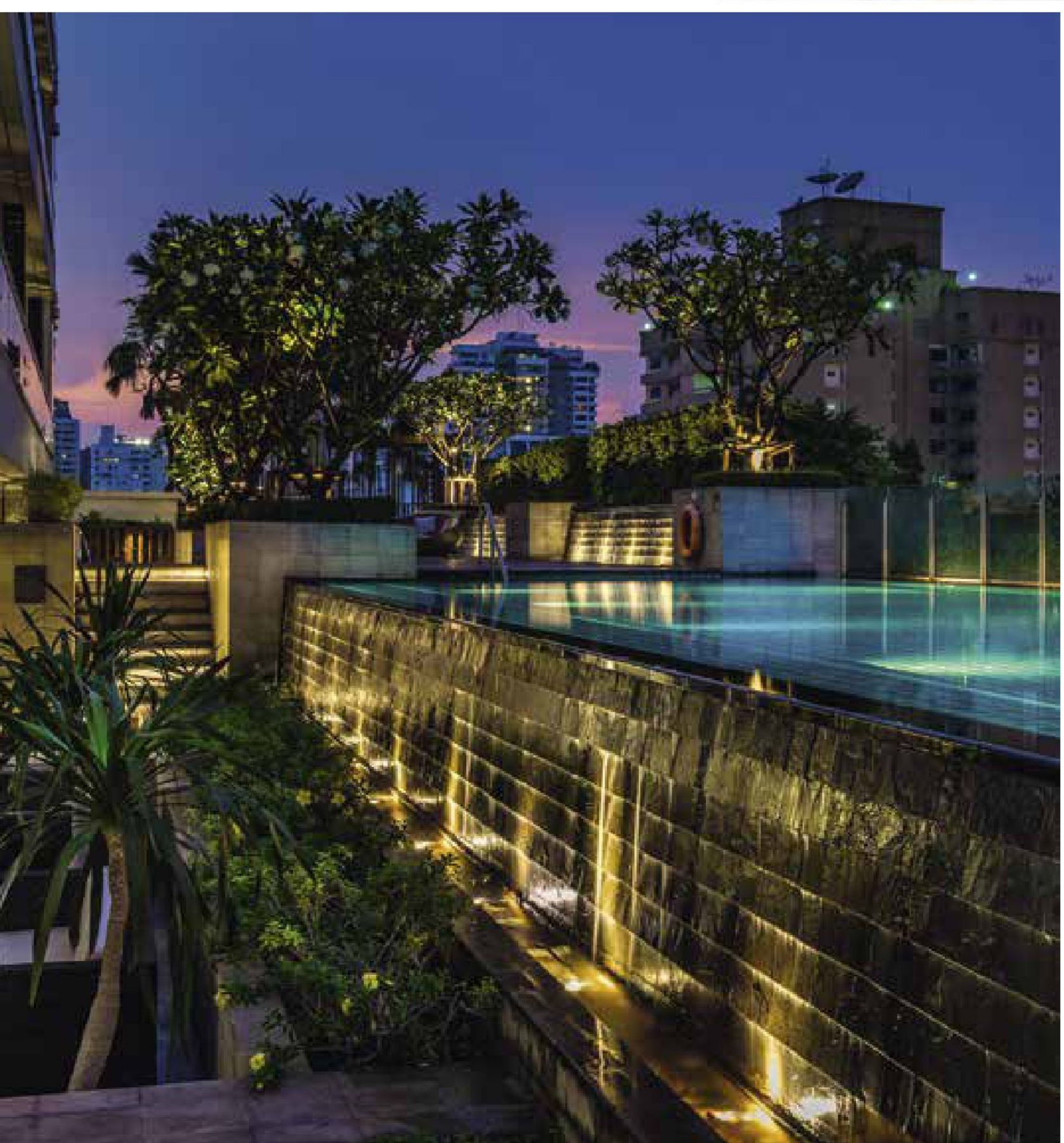
For sumptuous style

£££ ROSEWOOD BANGKOK

The structure of the Rosewood building — inspired by the Thai *wei* greeting with palms pressed together — has made the hotel a new downtown landmark. Inside, it feels more private residence than typical 21st-century Asian hotel. The lobby branches off into a brasserie with light filtering through pretty Thai fretwork. Luxurious creams, gold and bronzes dominate the 159 guest rooms and suites, complemented by marble bathrooms, cocktail bars, art pieces and top tech. There's also an undercover pool wedged between the two halves of the building, a great Chinese restaurant and a superb little spa.

ROOMS: Doubles from £275, room only.

rosewoodhotels.com



For real city living

£ AKYRA THONGLOR BANGKOK

Just a few sky train stops from downtown (and the river), the hipster Thonglor neighbourhood has seen an influx of artists, designers, baristas and mixologists in recent years. It's also easy to navigate and has great indie shopping, as well as some fabulous affordable hotels, including the Akyra. Offering apartment-style living, its smoky-hued guest rooms are spacious (particularly the 'residences', which come with kitchens and washing machines), and most have balconies or terraces — a rarity in Bangkok. There's also a sliver of a rooftop pool, a bar, a casual restaurant and a speakeasy.

ROOMS: Doubles from £65, B&B.

theakyra.com

WELCOME TO YOUR

BANGKOK HIDEAWAY

Set on 3 acres of verdant frontage along the Chao Phraya River, The Siam features 39 of Bangkok's most spacious suites and private pool villas as well as Connie's Cottage, a unique historical Thai teak house.

Designed by internationally acclaimed architect Bill Bensley, the Art Deco inspired and Thai antique infused masterpiece is the kingdom's premier urban resort in the Royal Dusit district.

3/2 Thanon Khao, Vachirapayabal, Dusit, Bangkok 10330 Thailand
T +66(0) 2206 6999 F +66(0) 2206 6998
E reservations@thesiamhotel.com W www.thesiamhotel.com

THE SIAM

For creative types

£ COMO METROPOLITAN BANGKOK

Set up by Singaporean hotelier Christina Ong, the design-led Como is a favourite hang out among the city's stylish set. Find them peacocking by the palm-fringed pool, clip-clopping their Ferragamos across the makha-wood lobby floor, comparing notes at lauded Thai restaurant Nahm, and clinking glasses at the Met Bar. The 169 rooms are calming cocoons, with dark wood floors, white walls and oversized limestone bathrooms. But for ultimate relaxation, book a 90-minute signature massage at the Como Shambala Spa.

ROOMS: Doubles from £88, B&B. *comohotels.com*

For five-star views

£ SALA RATTANAKOSIN BANGKOK

Sala Rattanakosin offers the perfect spot to gaze across the river at the Wat Arun temple in all its ethereal glory. Its 15 guest rooms have a modern Thai look (black, white, ebony floors, low-slung beds); there's also an excellent Thai restaurant and a slick rooftop bar. It's just around the corner from Wat Pho Thai Traditional Massage School, a national institution where a one-hour rub-downs start from just £10.

ROOMS: Doubles from £95, B&B. *salahospitality.com*

For pure pampering

££ THE PENINSULA BANGKOK

There are a number of ways to arrive at The Peninsula Bangkok: in one of the hotel's fleet of 'Peninsula Green' Rolls Royces, by liveried tuk-tuk, in a teak river boat, or by alighting from a helicopter and entering your suite via the aviation lounge. Breakfast — piles of tropical fruit, silver pots of tea — on the riverside is a dreamy affair, and then there's the world-class spa, housed in a three-story, teak-lined mansion.

ROOMS: Doubles from £160, B&B. *peninsula.com*

For discerining diners

£ SHANGHAI MANSION BANGKOK

Turn left out of Shanghai Mansion and you'll run into Gaew's Mango Stand, a street cart selling mango sticky rice that's a fixture on city food tours. Across the road is another city institution, Nai Ek Roll Noodles. There's a feast for the eyes, too, inside the hotel, with its Chinese-style red lacquerwork, koi ponds and silk lanterns. Guest rooms are equally vivacious, with rosewood four-posters, vivid silks and antique telephones.

ROOMS: Doubles from £59, B&B. *shanghaimansion.com*

For a pool with a view

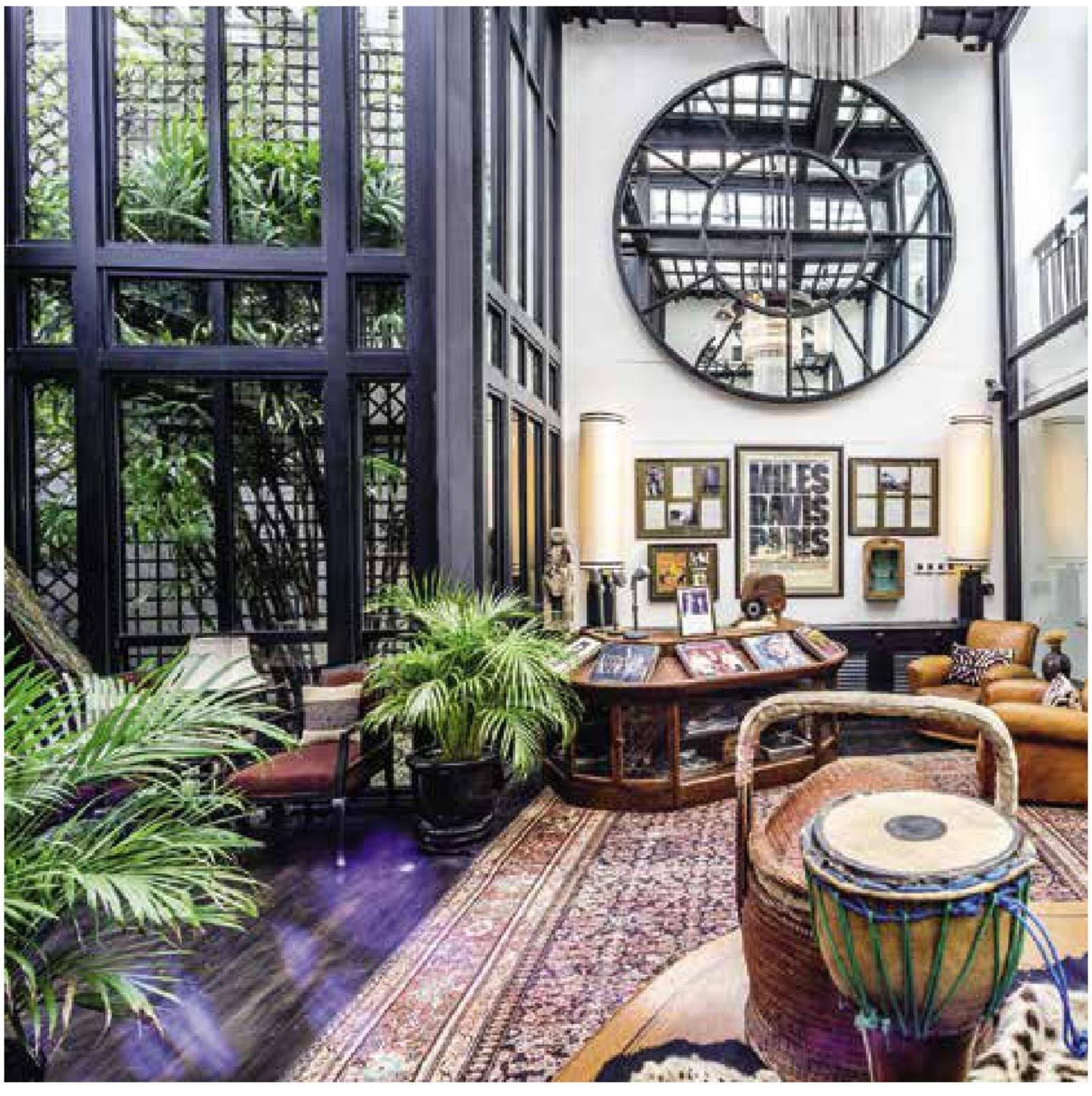
£££ 137 PILLARS SUITES & RESIDENCES

The emphasis at 137 Pillars Suites is most definitely on the vertical, from the lofty glass lobby to the floor-to-ceiling windows in the lavish guest rooms, and the showstopping rooftop pool with its drop-away city views. There's also a sixth-floor mini putting green and driving range, and the top-notch Nitra Spa. The food is suitably fabulous, with contemporary Thai, European fine dining, cocktails, wines and cigars all on the menu across the hotel's five bars and restaurants.
ROOMS: Doubles from £349, B&B.
137pillarsbangkok.com

For vintage vibes

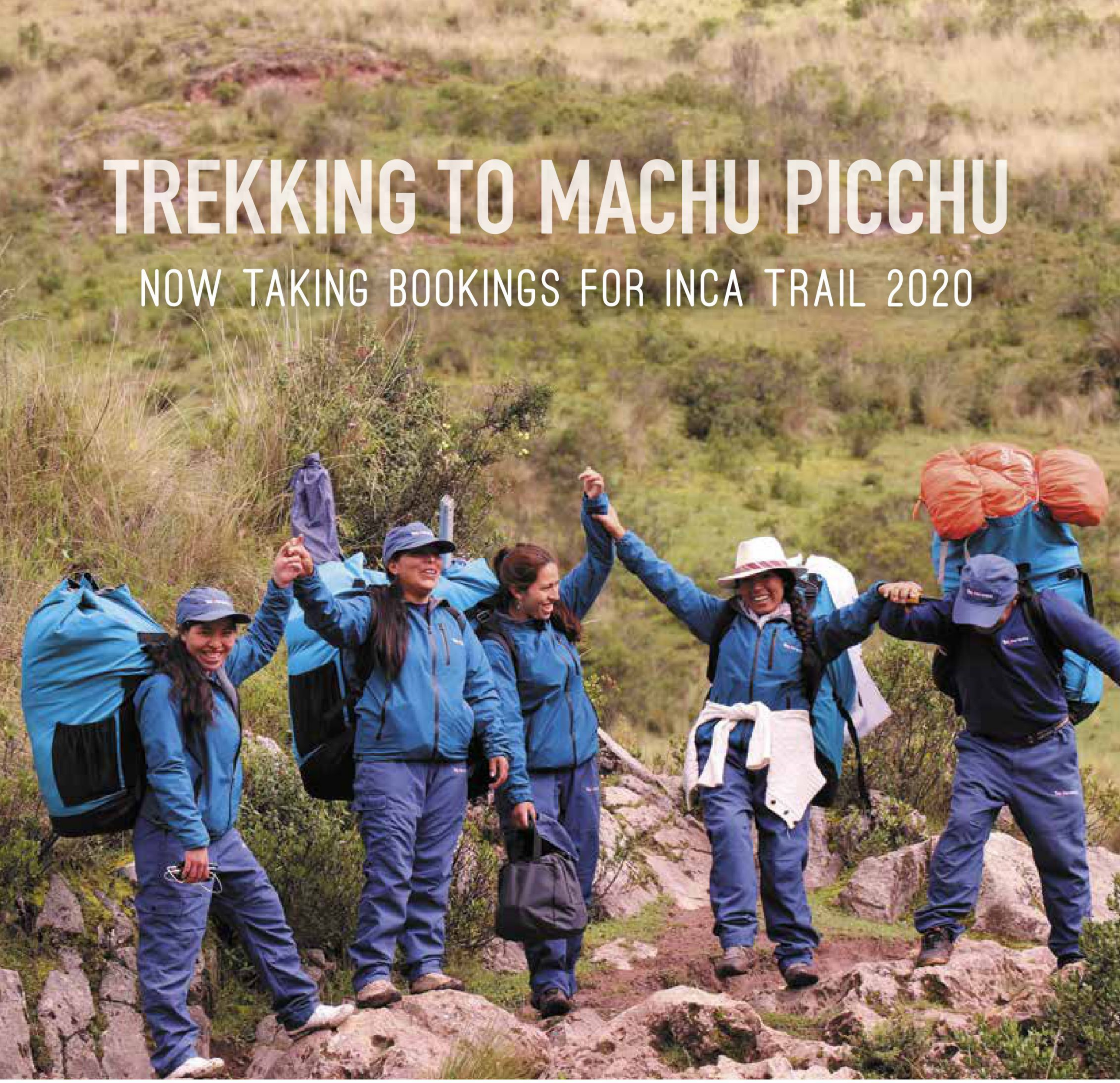
£££ THE SIAM HOTEL

If you want a taste of Bangkok during the golden age of travel — birdsong at dawn, butlers and river boats, an air of mystery — The Siam is for you. Tucked away upriver from the Grand Palace, its discreet doorway opens onto a monochrome mansion with a verdant inner courtyard. From the entrance, a series of corridors and stone steps lead to a superb subterranean spa and a waterfront terrace with a pool and wonderful Chao river views. Suites and villas are Wes Anderson-y affairs with soaring ceilings, button-back armchairs, sprays of orchids and claw bathtubs. Villas also have private pools.
ROOMS: Doubles from £325, B&B.
thesiamhotel.com



TREKKING TO MACHU PICCHU

NOW TAKING BOOKINGS FOR INCA TRAIL 2020



Hiking to Machu Picchu is a once-in-a-lifetime experience and an opportunity not to be missed. Enjoy Peru's diverse ecological zones, which house an abundance of flora and fauna, all while learning about the history and mysteries of the Inca Empire. Finish your trek in Machu Picchu, one of the most majestic and spectacular places in the world.

INCA TRAIL TO MACHU PICCHU

It's one of the world's oldest pilgrimages and is consistently ranked among the 10 best hikes on the planet. Over four days, you'll be hiking the ancient Inca trail that leads to Machu Picchu.

SALKANTAY TREK TO MACHU PICCHU

The most challenging and adventurous tour offered by TreXperience. You'll pass mountains, lakes, coffee farms, coca plantations and cloud forest before finishing up at Machu Picchu.

LARES TREK TO MACHU PICCHU.

This route takes you off the beaten track. You'll meet members of traditional Andean communities, visit local schools, walk with llamas and alpacas and experience Peru's rich history and culture.

TREXPERIENCE

Find out more about what TreXperience has to offer at trexperienceperu.com

The heartland of the great Inca empire, Peru is blessed with mountains, jungle, desert and world-renowned cuisine. With no fewer than three Amazon regions, where scarlet macaws glide among the mountainside burial chambers of ancient ‘cloud warriors’, amongst its sky-scraping peaks you’ll find the largest pre-Columbian city in the Americas and ancient citadels that predate the country’s most famous site, Machu Picchu, by almost a millennium. From slick city restaurants pioneering modern cuisine to remote rainforest treks, we bring you the best of this South American country

WORDS **NICOLA TRUP & BEN LERWILL**

IMAGE: ROBERT HARDING

EYEWITNESS

THE LARES TREK

An alternative to Machu Picchu's Inca Trail, this route through the southern Andes links Peru's archaeological sites and traditional communities, following lightly trodden paths where you'll encounter few other travellers — unless you count alpacas

"The Inca Trail is beautiful, but you're never alone — and the toilets are disgusting."

Juan doesn't pull any punches when it comes to explaining why we've chosen a different route to Machu Picchu. And while our comfort breaks aren't exactly the height of luxury, being more bush than bathroom, we've seen no other hikers since setting off.

Much like the Inca Trail, the Lares Trek isn't so much a single route as a network of trails across the Sacred Valley, with almost endless configurations. And in this version, run by local outfit Mountain Lodges of Peru, we're hiking along lightly trodden paths that link archaeological sites with traditional communities, traversing the southern Andes en route to our (luxurious) lodgings. Parts of the journey are taken by car, along twisting mountain roads, but each day we hike for several hours, barely seeing another soul, save for the gangs of llamas and alpacas that eye us suspiciously from the hillsides.

"Do you feel the altitude?" I ask Juan, our guide, on the first day. He looks at me pityingly: "I'm here all the time, so it's okay." It's like I've run a mile, but in reality we've only walked a few metres — and at a very slow pace. We're nearly 10,000ft above sea level, where the oxygen is thin. Behind our group walks a woman from a nearby village, herding a donkey with emergency supplies of water and oxygen strapped to its back. She's dressed in the formal-looking, frills-and-flamboyant-colours ensemble many women sport in this rural area. It's a look imported by the Spanish colonialists, and comes with sandals, but as we trudge uphill in walking boots, she scales the stone-speckled slope with no trouble.

Over the next few days, breathing gets easier. We cross mountain passes at more than 13,000ft, from which the peak-studded landscape unfolds in front of us like a crumpled map. We pass rectangles of emerald-green grass used as grazing grounds for guinea pigs, and wooden racks on which vast quantities of multicoloured corn are drying. One day we find ourselves, in gloomy weather, walking across a marshy mountain plateau that's strangely reminiscent of the North York Moors.

Hikes are punctuated by many of the archaeological wonders of the Sacred Valley, from the remains of the circular buildings that pockmark the slopes at Ankasmarka to the sprawling city of Pisac, which reveals itself as we round the brow of the hill. And finally, we reach Machu Picchu, finding ourselves in a crowd for the first time in days.

Juan leads us to a viewpoint. The sharp peak of Huayna Picchu is just visible through the morning mist and, in front of it, the neat grassy terraces and geometric stone walls hug the hill. From here, the 15th-century site looks neat and compact, but it was once home to 500 full-time residents, along with thousands more temporary workers.

In search of another angle, I abandon the group to hike up to the Sun Gate, once the main entrance to the city. The mist seems thicker than ever, and when I arrive a few other visitors are draped over walls and steps like stray cats, mostly catching their breath. They're all waiting. And then, the clouds suddenly dissipate, parting just long enough to let the late-morning sun shine down on the site for a few precious moments. From here, I finally get the true scale of this feat of engineering.

The explorer Hiram Bingham, who alerted the world to Machu Picchu's existence in 1911, described the site as a citadel, while others later labelled it a temple complex. But they were all wrong, according to Juan. "It's just a normal city," he'd told me earlier. From here, though, it looks anything but. **NT**

HOW TO DO IT: Mountain Lodges of Peru offers the five-day, guided Sacred Valley and Lares Adventure, ending at Machu Picchu, from £1,494 per person. It includes accommodation, domestic transport, a choice of hikes and excursions, entrance fees and all meals. Excludes international flights. *mountainlodgesofperu.com*

HOW TO

Tell the difference between a llama and an alpaca

Throughout the hills and valleys of central Peru you'll find fluffy camelids going about their business, chewing the scenery and eyeing up passers-by. But what exactly distinguishes a llama from an alpaca? Firstly, the former is bigger, growing up to 6ft tall, compared to alpacas' 5ft. Secondly, alpacas have small, fluffy faces with short muzzles and straight, pointy ears, whereas llamas have elongated faces and long, curved ears. And finally, if you get close enough to stroke them, you'll find the alpaca's wool is much softer than the llama's coarse coat. Now, how do you tell a vicuña from a guanaco?

IMAGES: GETTY

Farming in the Andes near Urubamba
PREVIOUS PAGES: Farmer walking home at sunset, Sacred Valley

24 HOURS

A DAY IN CUSCO

The capital of the Incas, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Cusco is where Incan and Andean baroque architecture meet

10.00: Set off to explore the historic centre, starting at Plaza de Armas. Once an important site for Inca ceremonies, it was decimated by the Spanish and rebuilt in the colonial style, so today it's a place of colonnaded arcades, wide walkways and a smattering of churches. Visit the cathedral for the art (including a 17th-century, distinctly local take on the Last Supper, in which Jesus and his disciples are dining on guinea pig), and the baroque Compañía de Jesús church for the gaudy decor.

12.30: Wander over to San Pedro Market, where, alongside fresh produce and an assortment of alpaca-wool products, you'll find everything from suckling pig to pastries, with a few offaly options in between. Wash it all down with a juice from one of the many women hawking mixed fruit concoctions.

13.30: Just south of the old town is Coricancha. Once the most sacred site for the Incas, it was incorporated into the Catholic church and convent of Santo Domingo. Today, what's standing is a confounding combination of original masonry and colonial architecture. If you have time, also squeeze in a visit to Sacsayhuaman, a citadel just north of the city dating back in part to the 12th century.

17.00: Grab a cab — or walk 10 minutes from Sacsayhuaman — up to Cristo Blanco, the 'White Christ' statue that stands guard over the city. Like a miniature Christ the Redeemer, it was a gift from Palestinian refugees who sought asylum here after the Second World War, and it's a good spot from which to watch the sunset (check the timing of this before heading up).

19.00: Sit down for dinner at Limo, a restaurant in the historic centre that dishes up Nikkei cuisine — the Japanese-Peruvian fusion of flavours — including top-notch sushi using local fish. Round it all off with a pisco sour, of course. **NT**

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Plaza de Armas, Cusco; Quechua, Sacred Valley, Pisac; circular terraces, Moray; traditionally dressed dancers at a parade in Cusco

Q&A

THE ARTIST

Cusco-based Berenice Diaz is the founder of all-women art collective Totemiq, and curator at XO Art House hotel

WHAT'S THE AIM OF TOTEMIQ?
Totemiq is a contemporary, Cusco-based art collective that I founded in 2016 in response to various objectives, the main one being the need to highlight popular Cusqueño and Peruvian art. We're losing techniques, know-how and skills for our native art — and with them the memory of who we are.

WHAT KIND OF ART DO YOU MAKE?
I have so many artistic interests, but I've ultimately found myself working in two styles: one is generative art (the union of art, science and technology) and the other focuses on traditional, local plastic arts. My surroundings are my leading source of inspiration.

WHAT ARE YOUR TIPS FOR CUSCO?
L'atelier Café Concept, in the San Blas neighbourhood, is a small cafe-cum-art gallery full of contemporary design touches. I often visit the Rica Chicha cultural centre, too — it's a space where shops, art galleries, restaurants, cafes and a bookshop come together to offer cultural activities. A visit to Cusqueña artist Isa Luna's galleries is a must; she curates an exquisite collection of pieces by artists, artisans and creatives from all over Peru. Lastly, ceramicist Julio Gutierrez's workshop has a great collection of local, colonial tin-glazed ceramics. *@totemiqperu xoarthousecusco.com* **NT**

IMAGES: AWL IMAGES; GETTY

IMAGE: GETTY

BIG PICTURE

RAINBOW MOUNTAIN

Vinicunca has an undeserved reputation for looking better in pictures than it does in real life; absurdly edited photos hang in practically every travel agent's window in Cusco. Yet, when the sun's shining, the peak also known as Rainbow Mountain more than lives up to its nickname. A three-hour drive from Cusco and a challenging hike up to an altitude of more than 16,400ft brings you to the perfect point from which to view the multicoloured mountain. Sands in shades of red and yellow, pastel pink and mint green — caused by oxidised iron sediment — drape themselves over the peak. And while you're unlikely to be alone, it's worth climbing the final few metres for better views over the heads of the other hikers. Afterwards, those who still have energy — and their breath — can walk a short distance further to another descriptively named natural wonder: the Red Valley.

EYEWITNESS

REALM OF THE CLOUD WARRIORS

In northern Peru's Amazonas region, the Chachapoya 'cloud warriors' honoured their dead with villages of chullpas, multi-storey mausoleums built high up in the mountains

Along the cliff, the sheer rock face is interrupted by a row of what look like Wendy houses. They're uncanny with their pitched roofs and multiple storeys, not quite big enough for grown-ups. On their walls, daubed in red, are strange creatures with long limbs, and symbols whose meanings are long forgotten.

In northern Peru's Amazonas region, the Chachapoya (loosely translating as 'cloud warriors') revered their dead, and hundreds of villages of *chullpas* (mausoleums) like these were built in the mountains to house those who'd been loved and lost. But the mummies once interred here at Revash — and the treasures that accompanied them — are gone; destroyed by nature, removed for preservation or pillaged by looters.

My guide, Ronald, tells me that until recently, visitors could walk right up to the precarious 14th-century mausoleums, but safety concerns have put paid to that. Instead, we're admiring them from a wooden platform built just for this purpose. The wet mist that swamped the landscape during our hike up here has lifted, revealing the lush cloud forest of the northern Andes. A vulture swoops overhead as little green parrots chatter loudly in a nearby tree.

Ronald gestures to the 'funeral mansions', with their decorations painted on in ochre. There are circles, the significance of which is unknown, and what look like plus-signs, which Ronald explains are 'Andean crosses'. "The horizontal line is where we live, below is where we go when we die, and above is the land of the gods," he tells me.

Some of the painted animals are spotted cats, once common around here, but, says Ronald: "We also know the Chachapoya would paint animals that didn't really exist. They'd combine different parts from different animals."

After the Inca conquered this area in the 16th century, just before the arrival of the Conquistadors, many Chachapoya were forced to relocate, leaving behind their *chullpas* and what was contained inside. And while some mausoleums continued to be used during the colonial period, by the time Revash was excavated in 1948, little was left, save for a few mummies.

To get a better idea of what would once have been inside the tombs, we drive an hour south to the Leymebamba Museum. The community-run institution covers both Chachopoya and Inca cultures, and its most prized exhibits were recovered in 1997 from Llaqtacocha, a complex of *chullpas* at nearby Condor Lake. The site went untouched for 500 years, until local farmers started taking an interest, and eventually what was left was removed for preservation.

We walk through rooms filled with artefacts, including clothing, ceramics and *quipu* — knotted strings used by the Inca for calculating taxes — spread out like angel wings. It's late afternoon and the light's fading, so as we enter the final room, Ronald hits a switch. Illuminated, behind a pane of glass in a temperature-controlled room, a row of faces stare back at us, hands up to their bony cheeks, mouths agape.

"They'd bury them in the foetal position," Ronald says, gesturing to the crouching mummies. Some still have skin and hair, and I'm almost certain one has eyeballs. Behind are others that have been left inside their bundles: snug sacks with faces sewn on. Outside, meanwhile, are replicas of the sarcophagi some mummies were kept in — colourful wooden boxes that look like oversized bowling pins, which must have been extremely heavy to lug into the mountains. But then, if I've learnt anything, it's that the Chachapoya were dedicated to their dead. And while these mummies have been brought down to earth, the *chullpas* built to celebrate them are still standing, up in the clouds. **NT**

HOW TO DO IT: Rainbow Tours can tailor-make a two-week trip to Peru from £3,895 per person, with stops including Lima, Kuelap and Revash as well as the Sacred Valley, Machu Picchu and Rainbow Mountain. Includes international flights, B&B, transfers and excursions. *rainbowtours.com*

IMAGES: GETTY; SUPERSTOCK

Ruins of graves, Revash, Yerbabuena, Amazonas region
LEFT: Decoration on a mausoleum, Revash

BRILLIANT BEASTS

Peruvian Amazonia's wildlife is as colourful as it's varied

TAPIR
Shy and herbivorous with a rubbery nose and spiky mane, the tapir is one of the Amazon's most singular-looking animals — its long nose is used to forage for roots, fruits and other jungle plants.

SCARLET MACAW
Is there a more emblematic rainforest animal than the scarlet macaw? Spotting its riotously colourful plumage zipping through the trees is the ultimate reminder you're somewhere special.

HOWLER MONKEY
This large, long-haired primate has specially adapted vocal chambers with which to create its famous, sonorous bellow.

JAGUAR
The none-more-stealthy jaguar is the largest cat in the Americas. A strong swimmer and merciless hunter, it's most-readily sighted during the drier months of June and July.

CAPYBARA
As the world's largest rodent — it's bigger than many breeds of dog — the webbed-footed, river-dwelling capybara is, luckily for us, easier to glimpse than many of the Amazons varied wildlife.

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RELAIS & CHATEAUX

INTO THE JUNGLE

AMAZON EXPERIENCES

MARVEL AT MANÚ NATIONAL PARK

Peru might be synonymous with ancient ruins and Andean peaks, but more than half the national map is smothered by the sprawling Amazon Rainforest. Few parts of this wilderness feel more pristine than the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Manú National Park, which is easy to reach from Cusco, but is atmospherically a world away. Capuchin monkeys swing through cloud forests, waterfalls tumble into streams and some 850 bird species flit through the canopies. Scientists and researchers have projects here by the dozen and boat trips are the easiest way to get into the belly of the jungle.

HOW TO DO IT: Journey Latin America's 12-day Peru Birdlife: Machu Picchu to Pristine Amazon itinerary begins in Cusco and takes in Manú National Park, with time to meet local researchers. From £2,066 per person. *journeylatinamerica.co.uk*

SEE THE RAINFOREST FROM THE WATER

Iquitos is generally regarded as the most atmospheric settlement in the northern Peruvian Amazon, but there's more beyond its faded mansions and lively bars. The city is also surrounded by a large network of rivers — not least the mighty Amazon — making it well placed for everything from short fishing trips to multi-day cruises that take in jungle lodges and tribal villages dotted around the region. The tributaries snaking off from the main river open up an exotic realm of flora and fauna, and for sheer pinch-yourself escapism, little measures up to watching the planet's largest tropical rainforest slide by.

HOW TO DO IT: Abercrombie & Kent offers a three-night luxury small-ship cruise from £3,200 per person, departing from Iquitos and including pink dolphin spotting, piranha fishing and a visit to a manatee rescue centre. *abercrombiekent.co.uk*

LEARN ABOUT THE LOCAL WAY OF LIFE

Indigenous Amazonian groups have been faced with some daunting struggles over the years, so tourism projects that hold a tangible benefit for local communities can only be a good thing. The southern hub of Puerto Maldonado is the gateway to swathes of lowland rainforest and is under an hour by boat from Posada Amazonas, a lodge owned and partly managed by the Ese Eja indigenous group. As a base, it not only offers the opportunity for plenty of up-close encounters with local wildlife, but it also teaches guests about the traditions and lifestyles of the people who know the region best.

HOW TO DO IT: Rainbow Tours' 13-day Eco-Friendly Peru Holiday is a 13-day tour takes in classic Inca sights before three nights at Posada Amazonas. The trip as a whole benefits various local communities. From £3,470 per person. *rainbowtours.co.uk*

IMAGE: GETTY

ABOVE:
Peruvian rainforest

ANDEAN
PHOTO EXPEDITIONS

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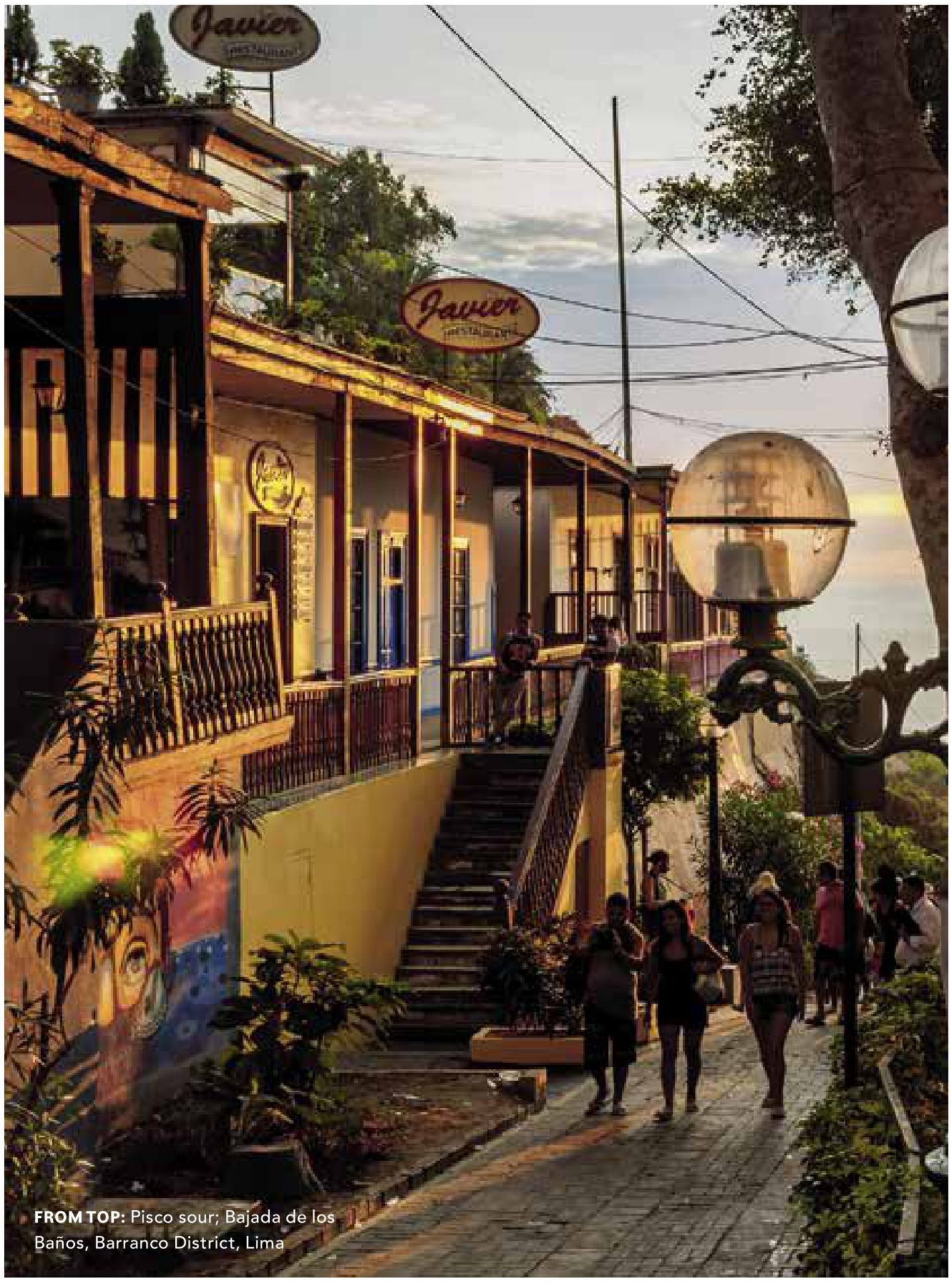

FROM TOP: Pisco sour; Bajada de los Baños, Barranco District, Lima

IMAGES: GETTY; AWL IMAGES

Q&A

THE DISTILLER

Alex James is founder and distiller at the London to Lima gin distillery, in the Peruvian capital

WHAT'S THE STORY BEHIND THE DISTILLERY?

We moved from London to Lima in 2012, looking for a new adventure. I'd been a captain in the British Army, and my wife was rediscovering her Peruvian roots. So, we packed all our possessions into a container, along with two *alembiques* [distilling apparatus], looking to start a business — my father's background was in viticulture, so there was a latent interest in grapes. Our distillery is an hour south of Lima, surrounded by grapes, pomegranates and pink peppercorn trees.

HOW IMPORTANT IS THE LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE TO YOUR GIN-MAKING?

Very, as we do the whole process in-house. Abundant botanicals are ripe for the picking, such as pink peppercorns and ground cherries. De-mineralised water is another requirement for gin — in my case Andean glacial water. Gin is typically made from economical neutral alcohol: wheat-based in the UK and sugar cane-based in Peru, but I use Quebranta pisco grapes, which give a softer mouthfeel.

CAN GIN COMPETE WITH THE NATIONAL DRINK, PISCO?

I see our gin as a natural extension of pisco — it offers a Peruvian-British experience. Plus, gin and tonic and other gin cocktails are now staples on every drinks menu, which wasn't the case seven years ago. *londontolima.com* **NT**

Q&A

THE CHEF

Virgilio Martinez Véliz is chef at Central in Lima and MIL in the Sacred Valley, with a new restaurant due to open in the Amazon next year

WHAT MYTHS ABOUT PERUVIAN CUISINE WOULD YOU LIKE TO DISPEL?

The whole thing about the melting pot of different influences is quite right; we have Nikkei (Japanese-Peruvian) cuisine, Chifa (Chinese-Peruvian) cuisine, cocina Criolla (Creole cuisine), and also African influences. But I think we need to speak more about our biodiversity, our ingredients and what people were eating before this melting pot. The fusion we see in the cities is beautiful and delicious, but there are also things happening in our natural environment, where people have had no interaction with other cultures. There's another Peruvian cuisine not many people know.

WHY DO YOU LIKE TO USE LITTLE-KNOWN LOCAL INGREDIENTS?

It's about showcasing ingredients that people have never seen in the city, in our gastronomy — even less so in fine-dining restaurants. It gives a new sense of place and provides opportunities to work on different techniques. Plus, we have the privilege of meeting the producers, and we feel more responsibility to promote new geographies and showcase their produce. Everyone knows about quinoa, but not many people know about different types of kiwicha (another grain). I could talk about all the different varieties of corn, tubers, root vegetables — the range of vegetables is amazing.

HOW HAS PERU'S DINING SCENE CHANGED?

Nikkei cuisine is fast improving. It depends on very good ingredients, and it's tasty. Cevicherias, where you eat ceviche and raw fish, are booming too.

WHERE IN PERU DO YOU RECOMMEND FOR GREAT FOOD?

The cuisine of Arequipa is one of the most emblematic of Peru, served in restaurants called *picanterías*. Not many people know it, but Arequipa has a repertoire with well-structured recipes and very solid cooking.
Virgilio Martínez Véliz's book, Central, is published by Phaidon (RRP: £39.95).
centralrestaurante.com.pe **NT**

IMAGES: ERNESTO BENAVIDES; JIMENA AGOIS

LEFT: Virgilio Martinez Véliz
FROM TOP: Sangre de árbol, Central, Lima; Chef Virgilio at work

CLASSIC DISHES

CEVICHE

Dining doesn't get much more Peruvian than ceviche. It's been eaten here for centuries, and there's even a national holiday in its honour (28 June). At its most basic, ceviche is made up of diced hunks of fish, briefly cured in a leche de tigre ('tiger's milk') marinade: key lime or bitter orange juice, sliced onion, salt, pepper and chilli. But every cook has their own version, jazzing it up with *rocoto* (Andean chilli), garlic, a smattering of herbs, or something else entirely. As for the fish, it's whatever's fresh and available. In the northern city of Trujillo, this can mean shark, while down south you're more likely to be eating trout.

LOMO SALTADO

A dish that emerged from Chifa (Chinese-Peruvian) cooking, lomo saltado is a national favourite. Juicy strips of sirloin steak are marinated in a tangy mixture of vinegar, soy sauce and spices, before being flash fried with red onions, tomatoes and Amarillo chillies. Coriander or parsley is sprinkled on top, and the dish is then served with both rice and chips — a double-carb combination that reflects lomo saltado's Asian and South American influences.

AJI DE GALLINA

There are conflicting theories about the origins of this creamy, spiced chicken stew. Some say it was introduced to Peru by African slaves in the 16th century, while others believe it was created by French chefs hired by wealthy Peruvian Creole families around the same time. Either way, it's a comfort food classic, comprising chicken in a vibrant sauce, flavoured with walnuts and garlic, as well as local aji peppers, which provide the stew's distinctive yellow colour. It's traditionally served with potatoes, hard-boiled eggs and black olives.

CUY

For Peruvians, *cuy* (guinea pig), isn't an everyday meal — this is a feast food. There are several ways of serving it, many of which involve the animal being dished up whole. *Cuy al horno* is roasted in the oven, while *cuy chactado*, an Arequipa speciality, involves compressing the meat under a stone and deep-frying.

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Inca ancient ruins, Pisac Archaeological Park

ANCIENT WONDERS

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

KUELAP

Founded in the sixth century, Kuelap predates Machu Picchu by some 900 years, and for a long time it was a place few outsiders got to see. The site, nearly 10,000ft above sea level in Peru's northern Andes, was difficult to access, but in 2017, Peru's first cable-car opened, connecting the site to the nearby town of Nuevo Tingo. Now, after a 20-minute ride through the clouds, up a mountain and over patchwork valleys, you'll find yourself among ruins of buildings that were once home to a community of around 3,000. Lush with orchids and ishpingo trees, the site encompasses the remains of hundreds of the Chachapoya people's striking circular dwellings, some decorated with friezes.

CHAN CHAN

Hemmed in by the Pacific, the northern city of Trujillo and its airport, Chan Chan is the largest pre-Columbian city in the Americas, the remains of its adobe buildings covering around 14 square miles. In its 15th-century heyday, this was the capital of the Chimú kingdom, divided into a series of walled citadels — though just one part, the Palacio Nik An complex, has been restored. The main attractions are a ceremonial courtyard with geometric carvings on the walls, and a series of intricate friezes. Chan Chan is so vast no visitor stands a chance of covering it all, but new guided cycle rides with BiciTours are a good way of taking in more of the site than is possible on foot.

PISAC

In the Sacred Valley, just 50 or so miles east of Machu Picchu, the hilltop Inca ruins of Pisac are said to cover a larger area than their more famous neighbour — but attract a fraction of the visitors. In fact, visit in the afternoon, after the few tour buses have gone, and you may just have the site to yourself. Into the steep slopes are carved agricultural terraces, while atop the mountain sit the remains of plazas and pools, homes and ceremonial spaces, some of their walls still standing more than 8ft tall. The city is thought to have been built in the 15th century, though its Inca inhabitants were soon forced by the Spanish to leave their hilltop homes for the colonial town — also called Pisac — in the valley below.

CHAVÍN

One of the oldest archaeological sites in Peru, Chavín dates back as far as 1500 BC, when it was a pilgrimage site for a whole host of communities across the region. Set in a high valley in the central Peruvian Andes, the complex was home to a pre-Inca culture of the same name right up until the fifth century BC, and what's left of it today is a series of squares, terraces and intriguing stonework. Historians believe the Chavín people worshipped animals, so look out for the carvings of birds, snakes, cats and reptiles, as well as startling stone faces. Getting here usually involves a lengthy bus journey along bumpy roads, or there's a picturesque three-day hike along old Inca trails instead.

IMAGE: GETTY

Uros family, floating reed island, Lake Titicaca
BELOW: Plaza de Armas, Arequipa

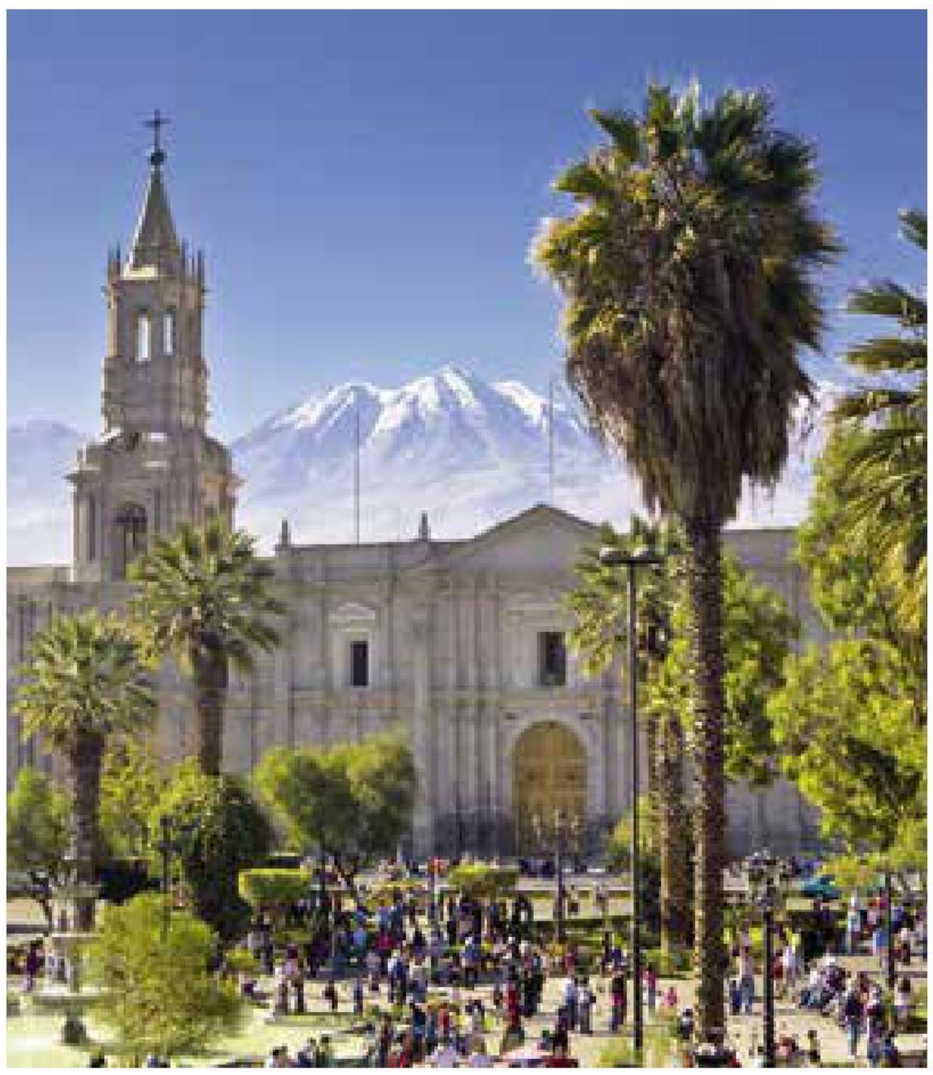
DON'T MISS

ULTIMATE PERU: BEST OF THE REST

AREQUIPA

The colonial city of Arequipa could hardly have a more dramatic backdrop. Set against a series of volcanic peaks in the south of the country, its UNESCO-protected centre is lined with courtyards, churches and old mansions, many constructed from the pale volcanic rock that gives the place its distinctive look.

Despite its population being around a 10th of that of Lima, this is technically Peru's second city. Sights not to miss include the cathedral, first consecrated almost 500 years ago and the focal point of the grand Plaza de Armes, and the enormous Monasterio de Santa Catalina, a convent which once housed 200 nuns and some 300 servants.



NAZCA

Everyone loves a mystery, but few are this big. The enigmatic Nazca Lines are a series of vast geometric patterns and animal figures etched across an immense spread of desert plateau in southern Peru. The largest measure around 1,200ft in length, with most dating back more than 1,300 years — but why, and how, were they made?

Designs range from a spiral-tailed monkey to a colossal stylised hummingbird. Scenic flights are the most obvious way of appreciating their scale, although the region also has a number of viewing towers. To the south of the lines, Nazca itself is a colonial town with ancient ruins nearby and an archaeological museum.

LAKE TITICACA

The word 'lake' can sometimes seem inadequate. Such is the case with the titanic Titicaca, the planet's highest navigable body of water, covering an area some 15 times larger than Lake Geneva. Sitting at a dizzying altitude of 12,500ft in the extreme southeast of the country — Peru's border with Bolivia actually bisects the lake — it remains one of South America's most fabled sights.

The green profile of the Andes hunkers on the horizon and more than 40 islands scatter the lake's surface. Puno is the largest settlement on the lake, a good base from which to arrange trips to islands such as Taquile or the floating reed islets of Uros. Further north is Sillustani, a site famous for its pre-Incan stone burial towers.

GETTING THERE

BRITISH AIRWAYS flies direct from Gatwick to Lima twice weekly, with an additional flight during summer. Average flight time: 12h30m.

WHERE TO STAY

BELMOND has six hotels around Peru, including Belmond Miraflores Park in Lima, where double rooms start at US$255 (£204). *belmond.com*
INKATERRA has seven lodges around the country. Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel offers double rooms from US$498 (£396). *inkaterra.com*

MORE INFO

peru.travel

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Life on the longest river

TO SEE EGYPT FROM THE NILE IS AN ICONIC JOURNEY. THE BANKS OF THE WORLD'S LONGEST WATERWAY ARE HOME TO MUCH OF THE COUNTRY'S POPULATION, WHERE ANCIENT TOMBS ARE STILL BEING DISCOVERED AND DAY-TO-DAY LIFE DEPENDS ON ITS EBB AND FLOW

WORDS **EMMA THOMSON**

IMAGE: GETTY

"Need help remembering the name of Queen Hatshepsut? Just think 'hot chicken soup' or 'hat and a cheap suit'," wisecracks Mohammed, with a chin-wobbling chuckle. Egyptian history is a litany of long names belonging to a soap opera-worthy string of sickly child pharaohs, egomaniacal fathers and jealous uncles. But it's never lost its ability to make us marvel because, as our guide Mohammed puts it: "Egypt is the root of the tree where everything begins — it's the source of stories."

And the thread running through those stories is the almighty Nile. The world's longest river, it flows northwards from Lake Victoria to the Mediterranean, and almost Egypt's entire population of 99 million lives along its banks. "To travel it is to know the real Egypt," pronounces Mohammed.

Cleopatra knew it when she sailed with Caesar aboard the huge, two-storey pleasure barge *Thalamegos*, stopping at temples to introduce him to the gods, and ask for their support. A young Gustave Flaubert (before he wrote *Madame Bovary* and became famous) eulogised he would 'willingly... give up all the women in the world to possess the mummy of Cleopatra!' — quite a statement for a man who was known to love spending time in brothels. His desire to see the 'Orient' (the term once used to describe the Middle East and North Africa) was fierce, and the writer finally set sail along the Nile in November 1849 (coincidently aboard the same cruise boat as a 29-year-old Florence Nightingale). And, of course, we all know uncovering the real Egypt paid off handsomely for Agatha Christie — her travels aboard the steamship *Sudan* in 1937 inspired the bestseller *Death on the Nile*.

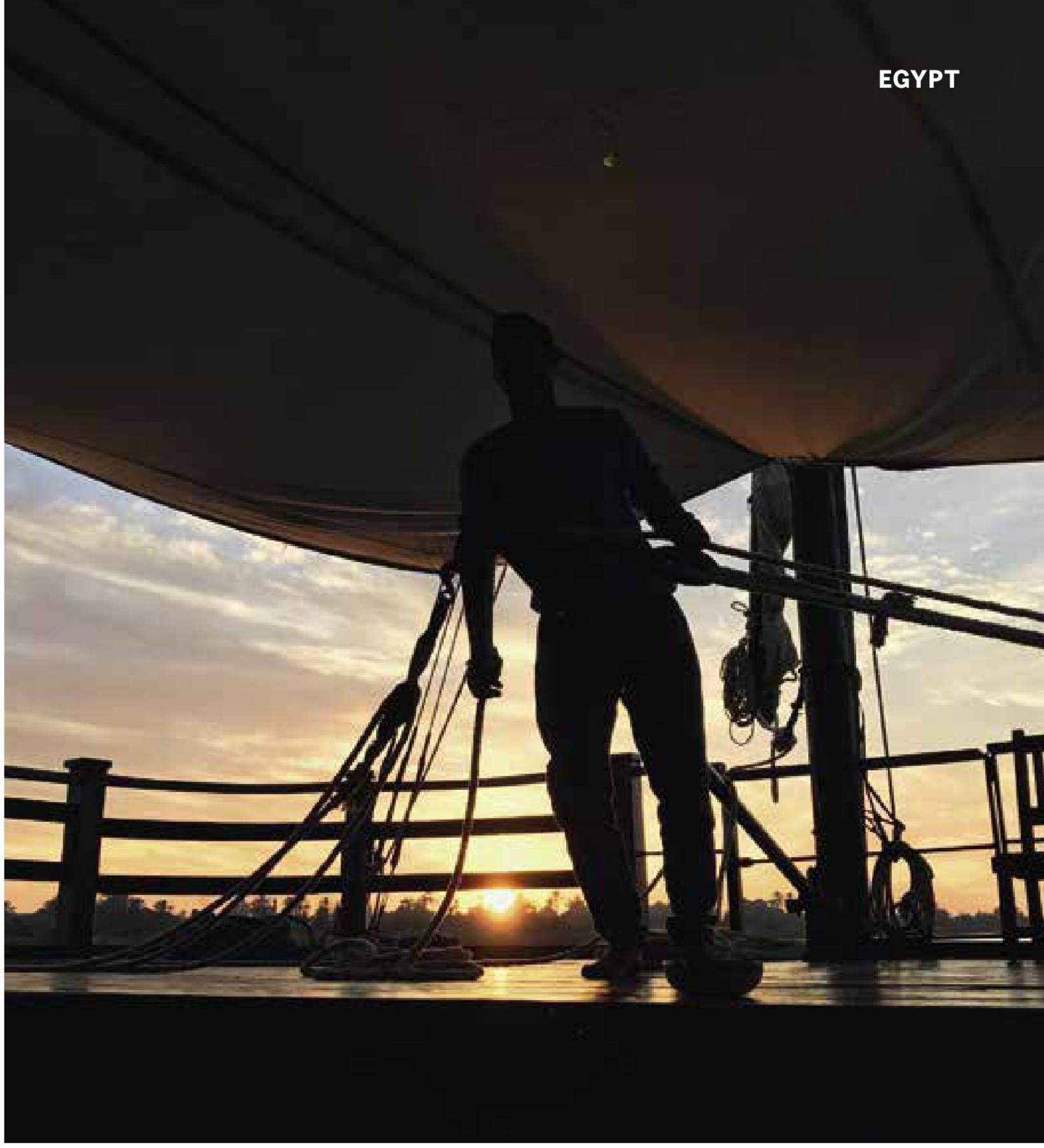
Travelling the 140 miles from Luxor to Aswan aboard a linen-sail *dahabiya* is the way to replicate those fabled, slow-moving journeys. These hardwood boats sleep 12 instead of the 80–120 passengers hosted on the five-storey cruise boats I'd seen herded together, 10 deep, like beaten horses on the outskirts of Luxor. Leaving behind that city's famed temples and pavements shimmering in the heat, I drive south, overtaking boys shepherding straggly sheep, and mounds of colossal cabbages stacked roadside, toward the village of Esna, to where our *dahabiya* waits by the water's edge.

A tugboat strings us into the centre of the broad river and as we drift away, we leave the dust and honking horns behind. With a heave-ho on the ropes, the barefoot crew casts open the sails until the only sound is the gurgle of the glass-green Nile on the bow. Along the banks, life unfolds. A man perched on the rim of his canoe jabs the shallows with his spear, scaring the fish into his net; a boy diligently soaps down his steed; and a trio of lads in shorts stop playing to wave as we glide by. Our helmsman, Ahmed, leans his whole body onto the long wooden oar as he noses the boat past islands of high phragmite reeds, until he's silhouetted against the molten sky, and the warm khamsin wind wraps itself around me like a silk scarf.

This sailing tradition needs to be revived. Not only because in a world of bullet trains and jet planes it feels good to slow down, but to help the country get back on its feet. In 2010, Egypt welcomed 14 million visitors, but a succession of events after the Arab Spring brought the tourism industry to its knees, and by 2016 visitor numbers had plummeted to 5.4 million. "I don't how we survived. We used our savings; had to take loans from relatives," says Mohammed, shaking his head. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office

PREVIOUS PAGE: *A felucca on the Nile*
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Crew aboard the dahabiya; child carrying sugar cane on the banks of the Nile; harvesting sugar cane

IMAGES: EMMA THOMSON



travel safety map currently shows a grass-green swathe of 'safe' sandwiched between the yellow warnings for the western desert and the Sinai Peninsula — but the damage in travellers' minds has been slower to repair.

The following evening we moor alongside the island village of Besaw. Men row boats laden with huge alfalfa bales towards the shore, while others lead their cows to drink at the water's edge. Every winter, the Nile waters recede to reveal rich farmland and for five months, this 500-strong island community grows mangoes, bananas, dates and fodder for their livestock. Children playing on the hull of an upturned boat recognise Mohammed and wander over to say hello. He's been coming here for 15 years, and embraces local brothers Sayyid and Mustafa when they come to greet us.

A barefoot girl slips her hand into mine and we wander into the heart of the village. Kids shriek as their friends charge at them armed with the limp pincers of Nile shrimp. Sayyid leads us through the dry-mud streets, past women with babies hooked on their hips who nod in greeting, towards the home he shares with his wife Zaineb, their three boys and his parents, as well as his brother, sister-in-law and their two boys. Upstairs, Mustafa rummages in a heavy wood wardrobe and pulls out a book. "My wedding album," he says, proudly, placing it in my hands. He turns the pages, tenderly, very pleased with the Photoshopped images of him and his smooth-skinned bride.

He leads us back downstairs into a second lounge with plump sofas, a widescreen TV and — of all things — a disco ball that spins on the ceiling, casting pink and green lights over our faces as we sip the hibiscus tea Zaineb has prepared. "I've known these families for years," says Mohammed. "I've seen the benefits tourism can bring. They had only one water buffalo — no cows. Now they have five cows, goats and bedroom furniture."

"And, best of all, a disco ball," I enthuse over the din of the TV.

Dahabiyas at dawn

Dawn breaks, cool and bright — and with it, a surprise. Right beside the boat is Gebel el-Silsila, the site of numerous stone quarries. I'd fantasised about sailing right to the doorstep of the temples; of gliding, Cleopatra-style down the gangplank into their many-columned halls. But with climate change and the Aswan Dam narrowing the Nile, tuk-tuks are now the more usual way to approach the temples. Not at Gebel el-Silsila, though. Here, you can stroll from the shore right to the front door. And the big cruise boats don't stop here either, so you can explore the rubble, the temples, shrines and chapels with little company.

This was Queen Hatshepsut's quarry. From its sandstone came the statues and sphinxes

IMAGES: GETTY; EMMA THOMSON

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
Felucca boats sailing the Nile, Aswan; crewman steering the *dahabiya*; village kids playing on the banks of the Nile

of Luxor, Karnak and Sphinx Avenue (uncovered beneath a Luxor neighbourhood as recently as 2010). Chiselled into the walls of the quarry temple is a ship transporting an obelisk up the Nile — perhaps the same obelisk proclaiming Hatshepsut's greatness seen in Karnak today. Even the sand here still contains memories. Just beneath the surface are black grains: iron filings from the chisels of the original quarrymen.

A local warden solemnly nods 'good morning', but shrugs off his seriousness as soon as we escape the eyeline of the other officials. He picks up a small stone and throws it up a rock face. "Giraffe," he says, pointing at a hieroglyph. A little further, and he's cheekily coaxing me past a sign that reads: 'No Tourists'. I glance around, looking for Mohammed for reassurance, like a child lost on a school trip.

"It's OK," he says, appearing at my side. "It's just a bit tricky to reach." The warden has already levered himself between two boulders and waves for me to follow, so I lower myself towards the river and trace the narrow sandy trail. Mohammed follows. The warden stops and points to a ragged opening in the cliff above our heads. Like a cracked-open quartz, its innards are bejewelled. We help each other up into the niche and stand in slack-jawed silence. It's a humble cave: the roof barely clears my head, but the walls are inscribed with detailed paintings.

"I haven't been here before," puffs Mohammed, crawling into the cave. "Can you decode its story?" I ask, watching his eyes scan the walls. "I'm looking for a cartouche or king to give away the date," he says, fingers hovering over the glyphs, as if reading Braille. "See this offering calendar on the wall — the numbers and cups. Here! It says something about Karnak — that means it's from around 1,400BC."

Egyptian history is ancient, but constantly evolving. Every year, during the January to April dig season, archaeologists routinely uncover new tombs and treasures. Later in Aswan, we'd see Egyptologists excavating hills that are honeycombed with tombs north of Kitchener's Island; though the mummies of many pharaohs, including Thutmose II and Hatshepsut, have been found, their burial chambers are yet to be discovered.

The last hieroglyphs

Back on our *dahabiya*, a course is set toward Farez. We disembark and board a gaggle of tuk-tuks, which take us to a lean-to on the fringes of the village. Hammering sounds, as perfectly metered as a woodpecker, echo into the dusty street. "Meet my namesake," says Mohammed, gesturing to a man hunched in the sun, surrounded by offcuts of wood. Mohammed (two) makes crates from the wood of date palms, which are used to transport tomatoes and mangoes.

FROM LEFT: The royal sandstone quarry of Gebel el-Silsila; wandering around the columns of Karnak

IMAGES: EMMA THOMSON

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He gestures for me to sit in front of him. On an upturned log that serves as an anvil, he shuffles a strip of wood along with his foot, cleaving off smaller sections, the machete dropping mere millimetres from his bare toes. "It's amazing he still has them all, eh?" observes Mohammed. It takes him about half an hour to make one crate, which he then sells for 80p. For 45 years — since the age of 12 — Mohammed has made these boxes for 17 hours a day, six days a week. "The days are hard, but bringing tourists here validates his work," explains my guide. I help him hammer one together; punching the wood through the rough holes. As we move to leave, Mohammed stands then nips into the back of his workshop; he returns with an *ankh* (the Egyptian key of life), crudely fashioned from date palm wood and gives it to me. In return, I press a crisp note into his hand.

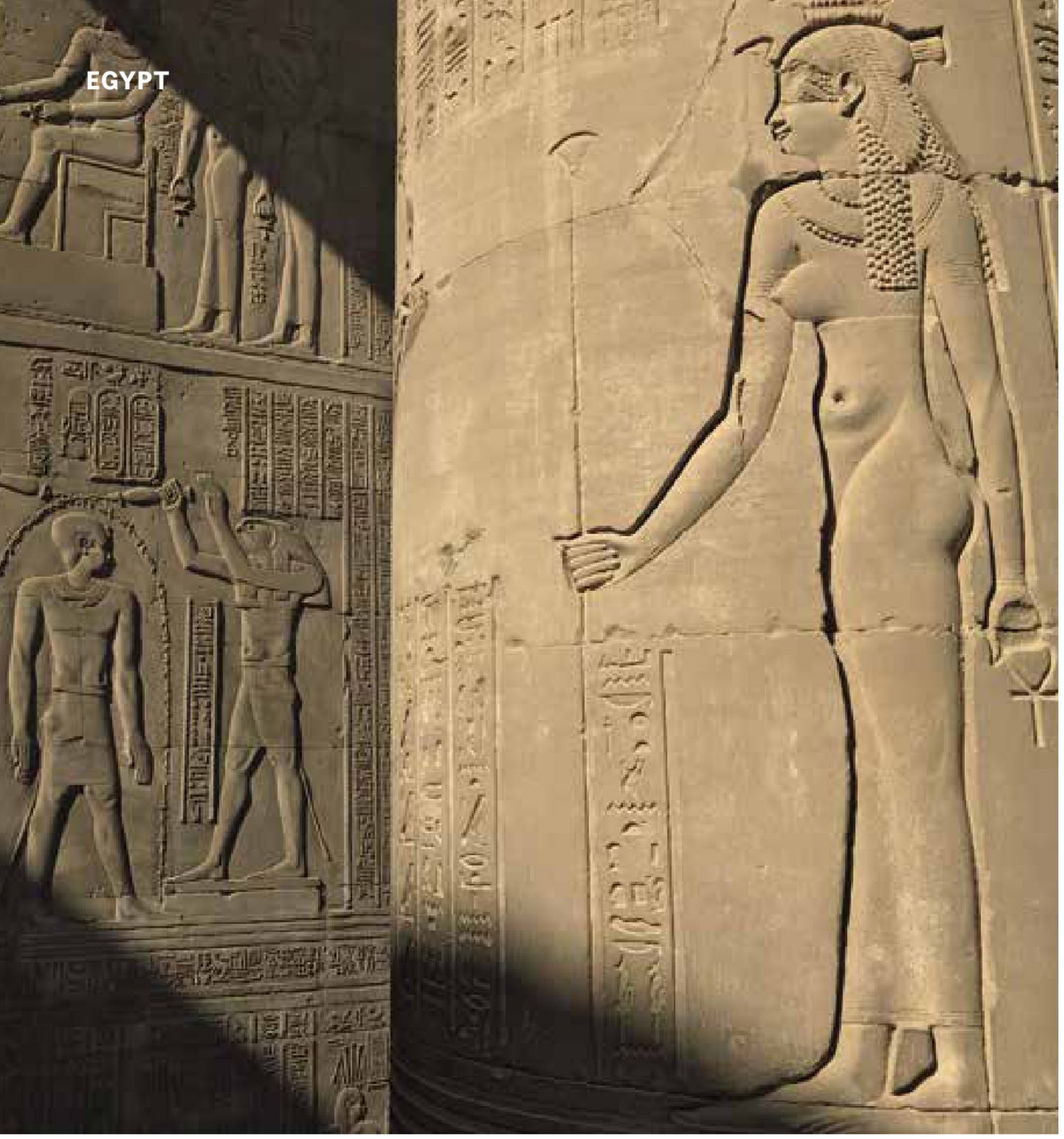
Sailing through the afternoon, a plateau of dunes rises behind the reeds. Raed, our captain, moors the boat beside a garden of date palms where his father once farmed. The crew strip off their T-shirts and jump into the water. "Coming?" they yell. I tiptoe across the rough grass, which is dappled with cow dung, and wade into the cold water. The silty bottom squidges between my toes, so I start swimming and find the current strong, as if it's trying to pull me back to Luxor.

Splashing around in these murky waters, the imagination wanders. I recall that this river also lends its name to a snappy reptile: the Nile crocodile. They once swam from source to sea, but "the construction of the Aswan Dam trapped them in the Upper Nile and its tributaries," reassures Mohammed when we're back on land. However, for the ancient Egyptians, the crocodiles were a daily reality. It's no surprise the southern half of the nearby Temple of Kom Ombo is dedicated to the crocodile god Sobek. Mohammed points out his regal figure, with the head of a crocodile and body of a man, etched into the high walls. Dangling in his hand is the *ankh* — just like the one Mohammed gave me earlier — just to remind worshippers that life and death rested in his hands, or jaws.

Later, I seat myself beside captain Raed as he watches the blushing sky and drags slowly on a cigarette. He's been sailing for 37 years. "It's in my family: my great grandfather, my grandfather, my mother — they all worked on boats. I've sailed them all: *felucca*, *dahabiya*, cruise boats." Haloed in smoke and squinting through his sun-creased eyes, he seems like a sailor of yore. "They called me the Black Tiger," he smiles, eyes on the horizon as he recalls his past revelries. But he traded them all in for his greatest love: the Nile. "When I'm away from her, I miss her; she's bewitched me like a drug. I stopped the drinking and the womanising, but I couldn't give her up," he shrugs. "When I'm stressed, I sit alone at sunset and speak all my secrets to her and I feel OK after that."

IMAGE: EMMA THOMPSON

ABOVE: Mohammed Taha making crates from the wood of date palms, Farez



LEFT: Temple of Kom Ombo

Morning brings us to the outskirts of Aswan. A cool wind has woken the birds, the lazy sun lingering beneath a blanket of mist. We drive to Abu Simbel, the 3,200-year-old temples that Ramesses II had hewn into two hills for him and his beloved Queen Nefertiti.

In the 1960s, they were moved back 250 metres to avoid the encroaching waters. The roofs of the mounds were lifted off and each stone painstakingly dismantled and pieced together again. "The pharaohs achieved great things building them, and we achieved greatness by moving and saving them," says Mohammed proudly. Even the detached head of the pharaoh, which famously inspired the lines from Shelley's *Ozymandias*: 'Two vast and trunkless legs of stone stand in the desert... Near them, on the sand, half sunk a shattered visage lies', was left as found.

The future is an uncertain mistress, and there's something comforting in the solidity of the stones, the stern gaze of the statues, and of knowing that 170 years ago, a young Florence Nightingale was dwarfed by these same colossi. 'When you've slipped down an inclined plain of sand 20ft high... you find yourself in a gigantic hall wrapped in eternal twilight, and you see nothing but eight colossal figures of Osiris... these imperishable genii who have seen 3,000 years pass over their heads and heed them not', she wrote in a letter to a friend.

Our last stop is the temple complex of Philae. Like Abu Simbel, it also fell prey to flooding and was relocated to Agilkia Island between 1972 and 1980. In the information centre, videos show locals rowing through Hathor temple, the water up to the cow-eared heads crowning the columns. Everywhere are signs of men wanting to leave their mark. Emperor Hadrian appears as an Egyptian pharaoh on the walls, so too does Alexander the Great; the Romans built the Trajan's Kiosk to mark the southernmost boundary of their vast Empire; Napoleon's soldiers covered the walls with graffiti, and one English soldier, N Pearce, fighting in Abyssinia, had chiselled 'Born at Acton near London'.

But something more poignant is to be found tucked away in a corner. The unknowing eye would walk right past it. Mohammed points to a few cursive symbols in the Temple of Isis: "These are believed to be the last hieroglyphs ever carved," he says, profoundly. "They're dated 24 August 394. After this, Egyptians changed their mother tongue to Coptic." It marked the end of one of the greatest ages in human history.

They shaped our world, now it's our turn to save theirs. There's still much to discover and Egypt needs tourist visits to fund excavations. Instead of leaving graffiti, we can leave an imprint of a different kind. "One tourist creates four or five jobs — that's four or five families you support," urges Mohammed. "Come to help the people survive — Egypt is safe." That's certainly of more comfort than 'hot chicken soup'.

ESSENTIALS

Getting there & around

The entry point for most Nile cruises is Luxor. EgyptAir flies from Heathrow to Luxor every Monday; otherwise it, and other operators including Turkish Airlines (from Gatwick), fly via Cairo. Return flights are best booked from Aswan where most sailings terminate, though all travel via Cairo. *egyptair.com* *turkishairlines.com*
Average flight time: 5h20m.
British nationals require a visa to enter Egypt, which costs $25 (£19.66) and is valid for 30 days. It's best to purchase the visa online (valid for three months) ahead of travel. *visa2egypt.gov.eg*

When to go

October to April are the coolest months, but try to avoid travelling in December or January, peak tourist season, during which historic cities such as the Valley of the Kings and Abu Simbel get uncomfortably busy. Avoid summer, too, when temperatures can rocket to as high as 50C.

More info

Ancient Egypt: a Very Short Introduction by Ian Shaw. RRP: £12.99 (Oxford University Press)
A Winter on the Nile: Florence Nightingale, Gustave Flaubert and the Temptations of Egypt by Anthony Sattin. RRP: £9.99 (Windmill Books)
Egypt: Through Writers' Eyes by Deborah Manley. RRP: £12.99 (Eland)
The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt by Richard H Wilkinson. RRP: £18.95 (Thames & Hudson)
egypt.travel

How to do it

WILD FRONTIERS offers a 10-day Slow Boat to Aswan tour from £2,415 per person, excluding flights. *wildfrontierstravel.com*

IMAGE: EMMA THOMSON. ILLUSTRATION: JOHN PLUMER

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SANTANDER, THE BUZZY CAPITAL OF NORTHERN SPAIN'S CANTABRIA, IS HOME TO A RENZO PIANO-DESIGNED ARTS CENTRE AND A REGENERATED WATERFRONT. BUT THE REGION IS MORE THAN ITS METROPOLIS: FIND RURAL ALPINE LANDSCAPES WHERE SEMI-NOMADIC PASTORALISTS LEAD LIVES THAT HAVE CHANGED LITTLE IN CENTURIES

WORDS **GAVIN HAINES** PHOTOGRAPHS **BEN ROBERTS**

“Vamos,” says a weathered old man to his horse, a silky bay that clearly wants to stay right where he is, grazing in the shade of a tree. “Vamos,” he instructs more assertively, pulling the animal’s reins. The horse, six feet of pure reluctance, soon relents and walks begrudgingly with his master along the beach and into the afternoon sun.

A charming rural scene, you might think — except I’m in Santander. “I ask tourists what they can tell me about the city and it’s usually just the bank,” sighs my tour guide, Eugenia Faces. “A Google search ranks it higher than the city.”

Wedged between the Bay of Biscay and the snow-capped Cantabrian Mountains, the port city of Santander is the capital of the Cantabria region. During its heyday in the 18th century, it was a prosperous mercantile centre thanks to imports from the colonies — mainly tobacco and coffee.

The multinational bank, on the other hand, was founded in and named after the city and is still headquartered here. Its owners, the Botín family — perhaps attempting to atone for their search engine dominance — helped to finance the redevelopment of the city’s seafront near the ferry terminal, which previously had a reputation for traffic congestion and prostitution. Now the area is home to leafy public gardens and the Renzo Piano-designed Centro Botín, an €80m (£72m) arts centre. It looked like an arrival from the future when it opened in 2017. “It was totally ugly here before — and you couldn’t walk around at night,” recalls María Cagigas,

Centro Botín's director of communication and development, who walks me through the gardens. "Now there's life here. The city has been linked with the sea."

Centro Botín, which sits on stilts on the seafront, has been described as 'Santander's Guggenheim' — a nod to nearby Bilbao, home to a Frank Gehry-designed outpost of the New York museum. The Turner Contemporary in Margate would probably be a more apt comparison, though. "It's not been the same as the Guggenheim effect in Bilbao," admits Amaia Barredo, the centre's exhibition coordinator. "But we're definitely seeing more international visitors."

My visit coincides with a surreal exhibition by the British artist Martin Creed, whose multidisciplinary show brings together the unlikely bedfellows of live music and wall paintings. Wearing back-to-front suits and plastic bags on their heads, performers even play outside the toilets at one point. "What the fuck am I doing here?" two female artists sing, much to the amusement of the largely young crowd. Some visitors seem to be asking themselves the same question.

But Creed's show is perfect for Centro Botín, which was conceived to inject artistic verve and youthful swagger into Santander — a city that, for all its urbane sophistication, has hardly been at the cutting edge of contemporary culture. "Santander is like a bourgeoise older woman, who was beautiful once," explains Eugenia, who claims the Centro Botín has helped the city look forward rather than trading off past glories.

But its past is glorious — apart from the 1941 Fire of Santander, which turned much of the medieval centre to ash. For this was the city where Spain's bourgeoise summered during the belle epoque — a trend originated by a British royal.

"This will seem like home to you," explains Eugenia, as we arrive at the leafy Magdalena Peninsula and overlook sandy beaches and rocky headlands at the entrance to the Bay of Santander. Eugenia, perhaps not realising I'm from the West Midlands, hardly renowned for royal residences, is referring to the magnificent Palace of La Magdalena, which sits at the heart of the peninsula.

The sprawling pile was built in 1909 as a summer residence for Victoria Eugenie of Battenberg, the British Queen of Spain, and her husband, King Alfonso XIII, whose tumultuous married life got off to a fiery

PREVIOUS PAGES, FROM LEFT: Playa de los Bikinis beach; view towards Picos de Europa from Mirador del Zorro
ABOVE FROM LEFT: Playa de los Caballos beach; Centro Botin

start when an anarchist tried to blow them up on their wedding day. “In homage to Eugenie, they built the palace in the British style,” explains Eugenia, as we stomp around the estate, peering up at towering turrets and mock-Tudor gables.

The royals were followed to Santander by Spain’s chattering classes, who needed hotels to sleep in, restaurants to eat in and casinos in which to flutter away their considerable fortunes. A construction boom followed and a seaside resort was born.

The estate has a whiff of the National Trust about it and I suddenly find myself craving a cream tea. Instead, Eugenia and I head into town to participate in the local lunchtime tradition of bar hopping for pinchos: mini, open sandwiches with various toppings that are held together with a cocktail stick.

“People come here for pre-lunch, before going home for their actual lunch,” explains Eugenia, as I scan the busy stalls in the Mercado del Este covered market, marvelling at the two-hour Spanish lunch. Long may it continue.

THE SIMPLE LIFE

Eugenia assures me Cantabrians “don’t do siestas”, but I break with local tradition and take a 10-minute commuter boat to Somo, a seaside suburb on the other side of the bay, to snooze on the beach.

Somo is dormouse-quiet, save for the church bells. Essentially a village, it has beautiful sandy beaches, where the smell of manure from out-of-town farms mixes with the salty sea air: surf and turf. I sit on the sand, warm from the day’s rays, and watch lizards scurry through the grass, while crickets sing unseen. It’s on the beach I see the old man and his horse, an odd pair who contrast wildly with the regal city beyond.

Santander’s highfalutin royal history seems at odds with much of rural Cantabria, where the simple life prevails. On the city’s regenerated waterfront, Eugenia and I had looked across the bay towards the misty Cantabrian Mountains in the distance, where, she told me, the Pasiegos live.

These semi-nomadic pastoralists, she explained, herd livestock between high-mountain pastures in summer and valleys during winter, spending much of their time living in rustic cabins with few mod cons. “They have no electricity or running water in the cabins — it’s a hard life.” It’s also dying out, apparently. “Young people don’t want to do it anymore,” she claimed, adding that rural depopulation is a growing concern in Cantabria.

Eugenia, who comes from an agricultural family herself, regaled me with a story about her great aunt, who lived in Treceño, a Cantabrian village five miles inland from the coastal town of Comillas, which, incidentally, is home to one of the few Gaudí-designed buildings outside of Catalonia.

In homage to Eugenie, the palace was built in the British style, complete with towering turrets and mock-Tudor gables

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A Cantabrian dairy; Iglesia de Santa Lucía, Santander; sea cliffs at Bolao; Bar El Jou, Potes

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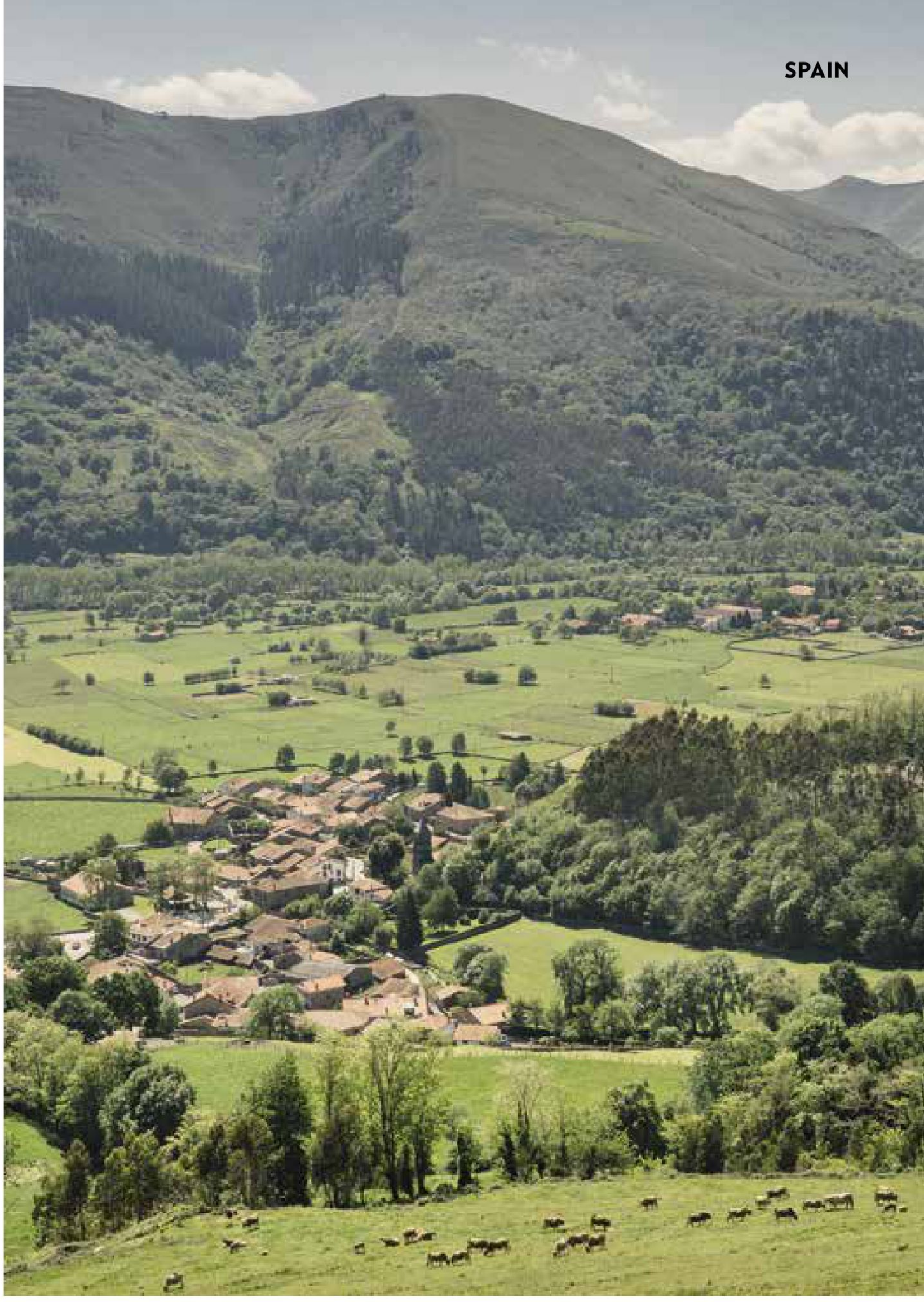

The drive to Treceño leads me along country lanes that meander through hills and timeworn villages; cows graze on verges, bells jangling

"The first time she saw the sea she was 73," explained Eugenia, whose family had insisted on taking the old lady for a seaside trip in her twilight years. "We asked if she liked it and she said it was worse than Hollywood." It was her last visit to the ocean.

My next destination is this village of Treceño, where I've arranged to meet Catherine Ferron, daughter of the First World War poet Edmund Blunden, a six-time Nobel Prize in Literature nominee.

The drive to Treceño leads me along country lanes that meander through fertile hills and timeworn villages. Cows graze on verges, bells jangling as they chew. Dusty Andalucía seems a world away; the Costas another land. I'm struck by how verdant it all is, hence why it's called 'Green Spain'. I understand why — as I put the wipers on — in Spain, the rain mainly falls in the north.

I meet Catherine and her partner, Luis, in a rustic restaurant near Treceño, where we share a steaming pot of venison soup and a bottle of red. Catherine was born in Hong Kong, where her father worked as a university professor after the Second World War. She fell in love with Cantabria after visiting three decades ago and has lived here ever since. On a continent where her father found violence on an unprecedented scale, Catherine has found peace.

It was the traditional rural life and sense of community that Catherine fell for, she tells me. "When I first came here the place was full of dung heaps, there was cow shit everywhere," she merrily recalls, proving you can be nostalgic about anything. "I remember waking up in the morning to see farmers going past with their carts full of grass. Everyone met for drinks at lunch."

Catherine explains that scenes like this can still be found today but — echoing what Eugenia had told me earlier — they're

ABOVE: The view above the village of Valle

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ABOVE: The stone ruins of a watermill along verdant sea cliffs, Bolao

becoming rarer as more and more people abandon rural life for the city.

Catherine and Luis, who run a tour company called Casa Cantabricas, are trying to arrest the decline by encouraging owners of rural dwellings to convert them into B&Bs. It remains a work in progress.

Bidding farewell to the pair, I drive further inland and almost immediately encounter a traffic jam. Not cars but a drove of slow-moving horses — all wearing cowbells. The animals are a sweet disorder, jangling discordantly as they're herded down the road by a weather-beaten shepherd. He waves as I pass in my hire car, which probably has less horsepower than his herd.

Cantabria's rural scenes continue to unfold. In tiny villages, men with white hair and walking sticks march determinedly to their local bar for aperitifs. Rolling hills and rugged farmsteads gradually give way to jagged, limestone mountains. I soon find myself driving through the spectacular Hermida Gorge, following the Hermida River as it meanders dramatically through the rugged peaks, where long-haired mountain goats graze on vertiginous flanks. One misplaced hoof and they're goners.

GOING UNDERGROUND

Glistening against the slate-grey sky, the snow-capped Picos de Europa catch me completely by surprise. Spain is not synonymous with dramatic, alpine scenery and I find myself taken aback by the frosty tops of the mountains, stabbing the sky at the end of Hermida Gorge. The peaks, I learn later, were the first thing European sailors saw when they returned from their nautical adventures — hence the name 'Peaks of Europe'.

I pull over and admire the scenery in Potes, a charming alpine town with the River Quiviesa running through it. Along its banks are a string of restaurants, serving stick-to-your-ribs Cantabrian fare such as *cocido lebaniego*: a stew consisting of chickpeas, black pudding, chorizo and... a lump of fat.

"It's typical mountain food," enthuses Ivelyse, who runs a nearby bar called El Jou. Ivelyse was born in Venezuela but settled in Cantabria because the scenery blew her away. "In Venezuela, people think Spain is flamenco and bullfighting and the coast," she says, peering at me over her purple-rimmed spectacles. "I think the mountains are more beautiful."

LEFT: Visitors at the top of the Fuente Dé cable-car in the Picos De Europa

I spend the night near Potes, waking the next morning to the call of a cuckoo. The intention is to view the Picos de Europa range from a cable-car, but because the weather has turned — as it often does in Cantabria — it's closed for safety reasons.

I hike the foothills instead, under the watchful gaze of vultures. They soar on thermals, scanning the valley for something to scavenge. The mountains are also home to predators, including wolves and bears. Today, alas, these creatures aren't to be spotted.

The wind picks up, becoming so strong a nearby waterfall starts flowing sideways. I'm soon back in the car heading somewhere the wind definitely can't get me: a cave. Beneath Cantabria's lush scenery is a network of grottos that harbour some of Europe's oldest cave art — said to be up to 40,000 years old, the most famous belonging to the Cave of Altamira. Their discovery in the 19th-century triggered a rancorous debate among academics, many of whom claimed they were fake, on the basis that prehistoric man lacked the sophistication to produce such works of art.

The main controversy nowadays relates to visitor numbers at the cave, which permits just five people a week — chosen by lottery — into the subterranean gallery. As I'm not one of the lucky few, I head instead to the Cueva de El Castillo, where visitors descend into chilly dampness and marvel at the mysterious handiwork of our ancient ancestors for just €3 (£2.70).

It's here I meet Marta Fernández, a local guide, who leads me into the gloomy grotto, where water drips from stalactites and the temperature suddenly dips. The artists behind the paintings, she tells me, lived outside the caves and came in only to exercise their creativity. How, I ask, did they see what they were doing? Their solution, it turns out, was ingenious. "They filled animal bones with dry grass, which they lit," explains Marta. "We call it the lamp of marrow."

Marta trains her own torch on the primitive paintings. There are deer, bison and a horse, as well as dozens of eerie handprints, which almost appear as though they're trying to reach out and drag us into the underworld. We have to crane our necks towards the ceiling of the cave to view some of the paintings, which are surprisingly high. I imagine their creators up there — perched perilously on slippery rocks, charcoal in one hand, marrow lamps in the other — risking it all in the name of self-expression, like graffiti artists on inner-city train tracks.

ESSENTIALS

Getting there & around

Brittany Ferries sails to Santander twice a week from both Portsmouth and Plymouth. Return fares from £470 and £560, respectively, for two adults and a car, including en suite cabin.
brittany-ferries.co.uk
Average journey time: 24h (from Portsmouth); 22h (Plymouth).
Ryanair has direct flights to Santander from Stansted and Edinburgh.
ryanair.com
Average flight time: 2h.
Travelling by car is the easiest way to get around the countryside. Cycling is also rewarding but hard work, particularly in the Picos de Europa.

When to go

Cantabria has a mild climate, with an average high of around 19C in summer and 10C in winter. While rain can occur all year, summers are generally wetter than winters.

More info

cantabriaspain.co.uk
casas.co.uk
elportaldepicos.com

How to do it

CAMINOS BY CASA CANTABRICAS offers a seven-night self-drive itinerary in Cantabria from £700, which includes ferry crossings and accommodation.
caminos.co.uk

ILLUSTRATION: JOHN PLUMER

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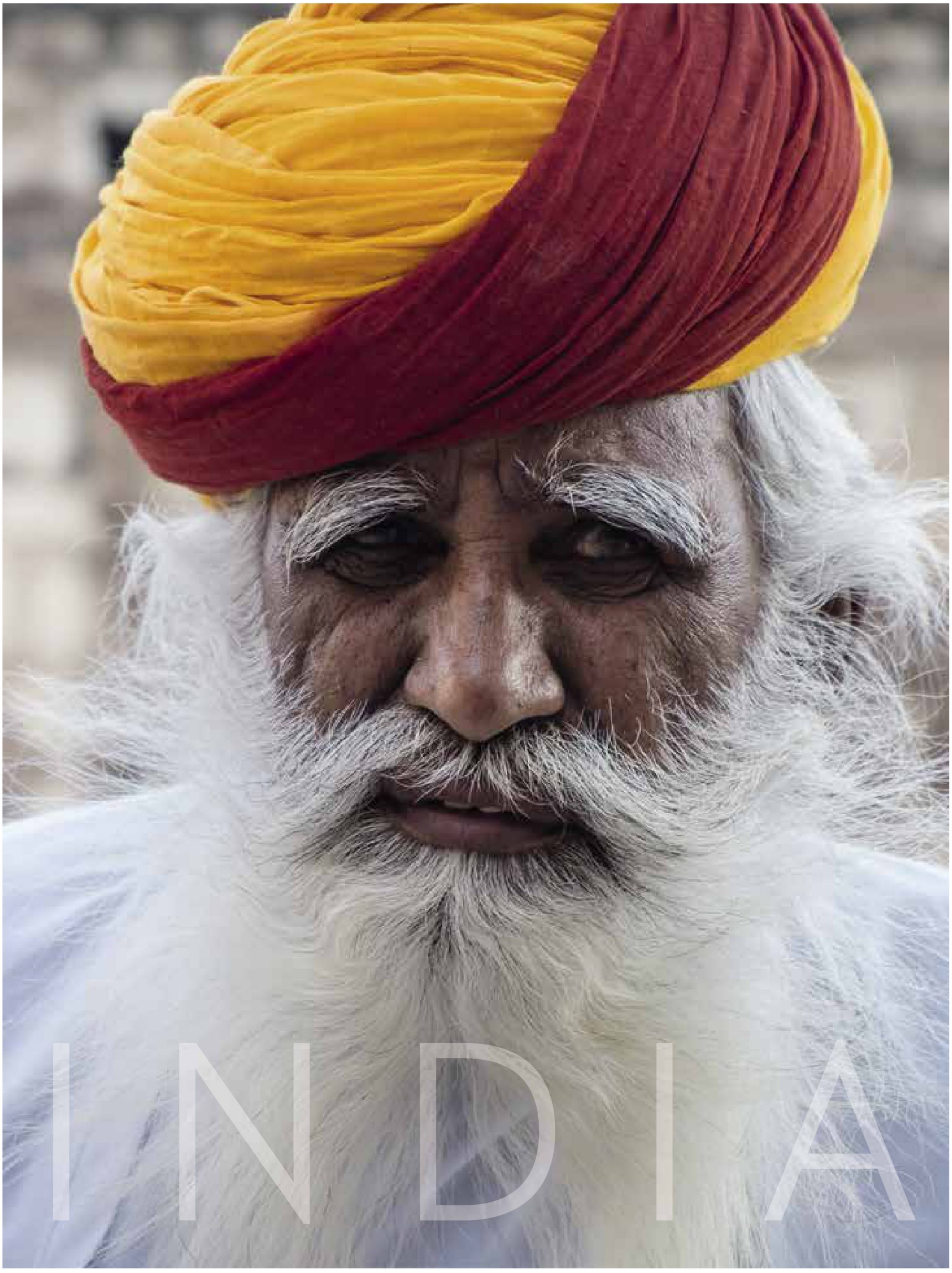

INDIA

The bright blue walls of Jodhpur are a striking, improbable contrast to the umber sands of the Thar Desert. Capital of the ancient kingdom of Marwar and the second-largest city in Rajasthan, the ‘Blue City’ has a fascinating heritage, having played a crucial role in the history of India, from the days of the Mughal Empire to the British Raj. The Jodhpur of today has a young, energetic population whose vibrance is matched only by the colour of the city walls

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS
FRANCESCO LASTRUCCI

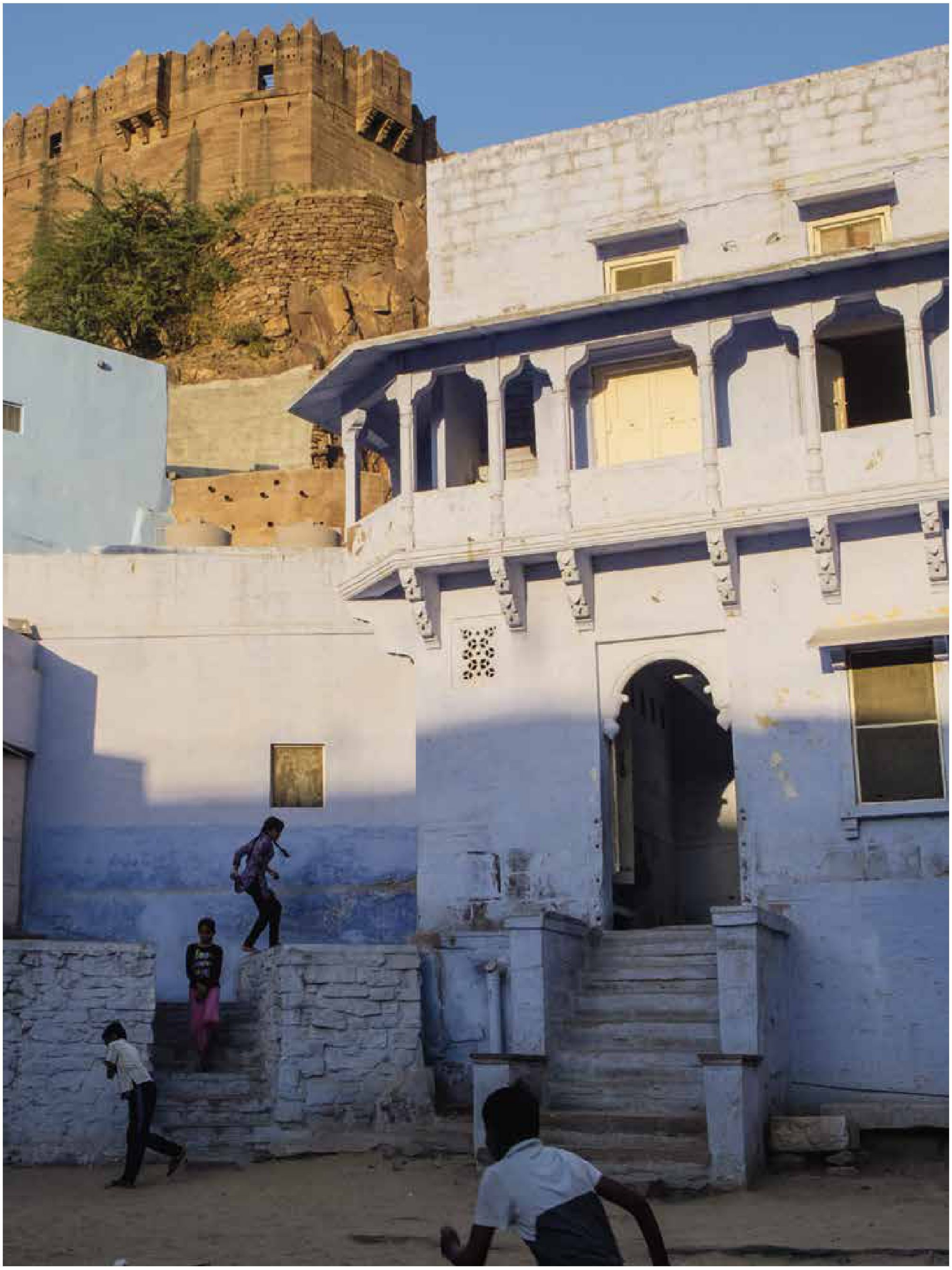
PREVIOUS PAGES, FROM LEFT: A caretaker of Mehrangarh Fort; Old Town doorway **FROM TOP LEFT:** View from the top of Mehrangarh Fort; street scenes

THE BLUE CITY

Jodhpur's most iconic landmark is Mehrangarh Fort. Built in 1459 on a 425ft-high spur of rock, its imposing silhouette looms over the city. The fort is accessible from the historic city centre via a steep staircase and offers the perfect vantage point from which to survey the magnificent panorama of blue houses.

The blue cascades to the horizon in many shades — from light blue to intense indigo — and serves to identify the homes of the Brahmins, members of the highest caste in India, from which priests are drawn. Wanting to differentiate themselves from other castes, they painted their houses blue, a tradition that still continues today. Some locals say the blue paint, a mixture of copper sulphate and limestone, keeps termites away from the houses, while others contend it's to keep the houses cool during the ferociously hot summer months.

Women during a ceremony on the northern side of the Blue City
RIGHT: Children playing just below the walls of Mehrangar Fort at sunset



Jaswant Thada mausoleum
RIGHT FROM TOP: Sardar Market in the Old Town; man at Sardar Market selling flowers to lay as offerings at altar to Ganesh

18+

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STREET LIFE

Wandering through the labyrinthine alleys of the walled town is a multisensory experience. The cubic houses are squeezed next to each other inside the city walls, alternating between shops and small temples all the way to the bazaar. The Sardar Market unfolds around the clock tower, beckoning explorers, while the blindingly white mausoleum Jaswant Thadas serves as an oasis amid the hustle and bustle of the city.

Back on the street, the carnival whirls on: the clinking of brightly coloured bangles, cows ruminating on pieces of cardboard in the middle of the road, scooters honking in a discordant symphony, ancient melodies emanating from well-preserved temples — all mingling together in a haze of incense, spice and dust.

FROM TOP: Sardar market, Jodhpur's old town; bust of the Hindu goddess Devi decorating a bicycle

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WHERE THE WATER

Lake Kinrin, Yufuin

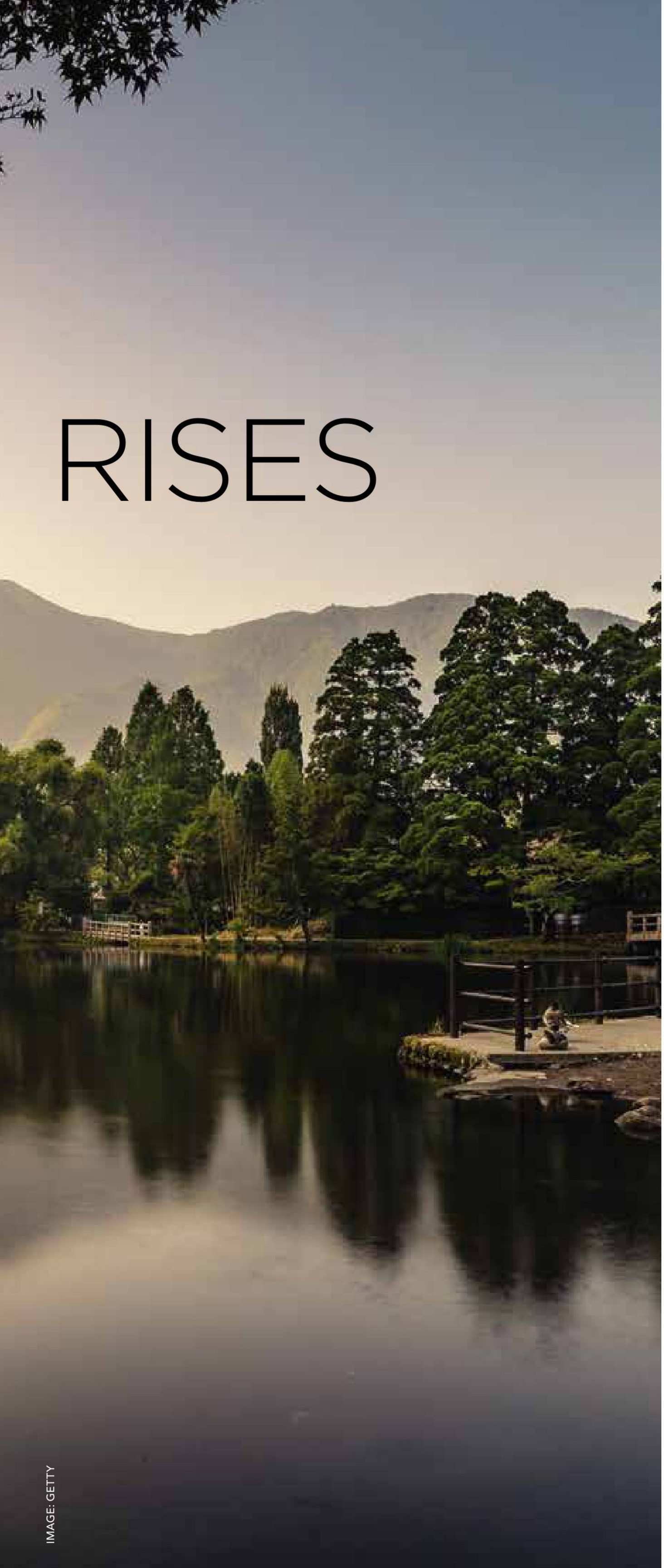

IMAGE: GETTY

RISES

The Japanese region of Oita on the island of Kyushu is renowned for its hot springs, Far more than just natural baths, however, they're places of healing and of community, linking the generations, from old to young

WORDS: Charlotte Wigram-Evans

It's 5am and I'm naked on a mountainside. Night still holds sway over the sky, the air is thick with steam, and a single bead of sweat runs slowly down the back of my neck.

The onsen (hot spring) I'm sitting in is the highest in all of Kyushu, perched on a hillside overlooking the Tadewara Marshland 1,000ft below. It belongs to the Hokkien Onsen Sanso mountain lodge, a creaky wooden structure full of mismatched furniture, well-thumbed novels and people united in quiet camaraderie at having made it this far.

This secluded spot is reachable by a three-hour walk up Mount Mimata; a hike that will have you scrambling over granite rocks the size of boulders, and across scree that threatens to pull your feet from under you. Almost nothing can grow on this volcanic landscape, and sulphuric steam pouring from the mountaintop at 500C stains the slopes a vivid matcha green. It's silent, desolate and completely spellbinding.

"Every time I take an onsen, I'm reminded of the sheer power of the mountains — the power of Mother Nature," my guide Kazuya says rather poetically later that morning as we leave the lodge behind us and head for the marsh. "The water we all take for granted here fell as rain more than 50 years ago," he goes on to explain, "heated by magma at the Earth's core before rising to the surface."

Oita sits between two fault lines, beside a string of active volcanoes, and is widely known as the world's hot spring capital; there are thousands in the region, where the red-hot water that bursts through the mountainside has been harnessed to form everything from large public bathing

Red pool, Umi Jigoku
BELOW LEFT TO RIGHT: Hiking up Mount Mimata; Okamotoya Ryokan's on-site restaurant

houses and steam rooms to private pools you can hire for family outings.

Being naked in the hot springs is obligatory, but what begins as slightly disconcerting quickly becomes liberating, and by the time I reach Yufuin I don't think twice about stripping off and slipping into the lakeside Shitan-yu onsen.

A bucolic, rural town less than an hour's drive from the marshland, Yufuin moves slowly. Little old ladies pedal by on bicycles, people tend to their rice paddies, and the streams that crisscross the valley gurgle their merry lullaby to passers-by.

Striking up a conversation with a serene, gently spoken woman, she tells me she's been coming to this bathhouse every day for almost 80 years: "The minerals in the water keep me young," she says. Agreeing wholeheartedly, I inquire as to whether this nationwide love of hot springs contributes to Japan's long life expectancy.

"Perhaps," she replies. "The water has amazing health benefits. A close friend of mine from Tokyo struggled with diabetes for years and was getting increasingly poorly. I told him to come to Yufuin and we took an onsen every day together for a month. He's now lived here for 10 years and, I'm pleased to say, is healthier than ever."

Looking out across Kinrin Lake, I think back to my conversation with Kazuya about the power of Mother Nature. It's evident too in the beauty of my surroundings; both boiling and spring water feed the lake, and steam eddies and swirls off the surface of the water. Giant koi carp skulk in the shallows, a heron silently picks his way through the reeds and behind, the deep green of the cypress trees that blanket the hillside is interspersed with bursts of bubblegum-pink. The cherries are in blossom.

City of steam

Just how intrinsic onsen are to life in Oita becomes apparent the following day when I reach Beppu, a small city of around 120,000 people sitting in the shadow of Mount Tsurumi. I'm greeted by my guide, Masahiro, who leads me through a maze of wisteria walkways to a square with what I'm certain is a circle of 15 wooden toilets, all facing each other.

"It's a steam onsen for your feet," he laughs, having noticed my dumbfounded expression: "I often come here on my own to sit quietly and read a book. It's so peaceful. Plus, it's the only one in the world." Taking a seat, I slip my feet beneath wooden slats in the floor, and I feel heat wrap around my toes, imagining how odd it must look when every stool is taken.

As if reading my mind, Masahiro continues: "It's almost always busy. Onsen are meeting places; every area has at least one public bathhouse, most with a community hall on the second floor."

We stroll on, past cats snoozing on steam vents and traditional Japanese houses with their sloping roofs and panelled rice paper screens ("I was always punching holes through those as a child," laughs Masahiro, "it drove my parents mad!"), pausing to sample some banana cake from a street-side steam oven.

Hot springs are used to cook with as much as to bathe in Oita, and we're soon tucking into steamed pizza (a bit soggy, but surprisingly good), our feet submerged in a foot bath hidden beneath the restaurant table. Pizza is followed by *purin*, a silky Japanese dessert not unlike creme caramel, and we're joined by Nobuko, who owns Okamotoya Ryokan, a traditional Japanese hotel, where I'm staying.

"No one here leaves the house without their towel and *yukata* (robe)," she tells me. "My boy is 14 and meets his friends at various onsen almost every day after school." It seems this shared love of hot springs permeates every generation, bringing people together, from the 85-year-old lady in Yufuin to Nobuko's teenage son.

As night draws a veil over Beppu, I head back up the hill to my hotel. Built in 1875, it's one of the oldest in the city, an exquisite dark-wood building smelling faintly of the fresh straw used to make the tatami mats that carpet the floors. My final onsen is a milky, emerald-green lagoon in the hotel gardens, the ground pinked with azalea petals and studded with bonsai trees.

Stars appear, sweat beads my forehead and I end my trip as I began — naked, surrounded by boiling water and billowing steam.

IMAGE: GETTY; YUKO YAMASAKI; CHARLOTTE WIGRAM-EVANS

Three more to see in Oita

Waterfall onsen, Kokonoe-machi
One of only two such onsen, the Utase-yu public bathhouse pumps water through pipes in the wall to produce a waterfall effect. Stand directly underneath and the pressure is perfect for a back massage.

Rooftop onsen, Oita City
In the region's capital, the 21-floor JR Kyushu Hotel Blossom Oita has a rooftop onsen that throws up amazing views. Take a dip at dusk and watch as lights flair across the city.

The red pond, Beppu City
While not strictly an onsen (the water temperature reaches 78C) this rust-red pool is a must-visit. The mud is used for skin ointments and is particularly good for rashes and burns.

Essentials

Getting there & around:
ANA flies from Heathrow to Tokyo every day, also offering daily flights between Tokyo and Oita. *ana.co.jp*
Driving around the region is easy to organise as distances between places are small. Alternatively, buses are reliable. *busnavi-oita.com*

When to go: Oita has a climate similar to the UK, with mild winters and warm summers reaching 30C. In April, the cherry trees are in blossom, while in Autumn the hillsides glow red.

More information:
To find out which of Oita's onsen are tattoo friendly, open air or private visit *en.visit-oita.jp/onsen*

To find out more, visit *discover-oita.com*

City life

BOSTON

As the cradle of the American Revolution, the Massachusetts capital has long upheld a rather historic, high-brow reputation. Dig deeper and you'll find a bold and brilliant contemporary art scene beneath the city's red-brick exterior

WORDS: *Connor McGovern* **PHOTOGRAPHS:** *Juan Arredondo*

"And when I die, they'll cremate me and inter me beneath the floorboards!"

Debby Krim shares her funeral plans with more passion than most. Not that she's morbid — far from it. She's positively effusive as she shows me around her studio at SoWa Artists Guild, darting here and there with all the excitable pride of a first-time mother. She presents her paintings, photography and jewellery, all the while her self-designed scarf fluttering behind her. "I've travelled all over the world and there's nowhere I love more than here," she says with a grin. Forget the next world, I think; Debby seems happy enough in this one.

A self-described realist painter and abstract photographer, Debby is one of more than 100 artists who work and exhibit in the renovated warehouses of SoWA, in Boston's South End. "It was gutted when we first moved in 15 years ago," she says as she takes me on a tour. "Nobody wanted to be around here. But then more artists joined us and completely changed this part of town."

Corridors are plastered with posters and the floorboards — the ones Debby has earmarked for the afterlife — creak like a Hollywood haunted house. It feels full of creativity, as if all the artists' paint and ink have seeped into the foundations and brought the old building back to life.

As she stops to chat with fellow artists, it's as though Debby's showing me around her home rather than her office. "It's a family here," she tells me. Many artists based on trendy Newbury Street went elsewhere when big-name brands started moving in from the 1970s. "And that's why the Guild was created: to get everyone together and share ideas."

We meander on through SoWa's galleries, admiring the fruits of those shared ideas: there's glasswork and handmade dresses, huge, vintage-style posters, furniture and fine art. It's quiet now, but the SoWa Open Market, held every Sunday in the summer, sees hundreds flock here to browse the artwork. I ask her about the rest of Boston's art scene outside of this arty little enclave of SoWa. "It's definitely down to earth. It's not snobby or elite," says Debby, earrings jangling as she shakes her head.

CHANGE IS GONNA COME

After a browse of SoWa's Vintage Market (held every Sunday in the warehouses' basement), I stroll through the South End, passing blossom-littered squares and Boston's famous, red-brick rowhouses. There's a carefree air to the city this morning: cafe doorbells jingle as locals grab coffee 'to go', and runners are out in the quiet streets. But this rather relaxed vibe is a surprise in a city whose reputation speaks more of movers and shakers rather than joggers and latte-drinkers. Founded in 1630, the capital of Massachusetts is one of America's oldest cities, its citizens having played a pivotal role in the US fight for independence. History is writ large throughout the city, particularly in Downtown, where the much-trodden Freedom Trail testifies to a revolutionary past of battles, speeches and treaties. These days, however, the city's seeing a revolution of the more artistic kind.

"We like to say: 'The Revolution Will Be Instagrammed'," laughs Rachel Charles of The Revolution Hotel. Housed in what was once one of the country's first YMCAs, it's been reborn as a hip hotel with a slightly

PREVIOUS PAGES: Courtyard, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum
RIGHT, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Steven Silver at work in his SoWa studio; Public Garden; painter Elena Francesca du Plessis at SoWa; Acorn Street, Beacon Hill

First things first *// Boston's always been a pioneer. It was the home of the United States' first newspaper, telephone call, chocolate factory, subway, public park, lighthouse, public beach, police force and university*

Ralph Waldo Emerson, essayist *// "Boston is the one place in America where wealth and knowledge of how to use it are apt to coincide."*

FROM LEFT: Boating on the Charles River; Daisy St Sauveur

irreverent streak. "Boston has such an incredible, rich history and so we wanted to blend all that heritage with modern art."

The result is a Banksy-esque homage to Boston: a colourful, wraparound mural with the faces of US revolutionaries brightens up the lobby, while a pillar covered in made-in-Massachusetts exports like Converse shoes and plastic lawn flamingos toasts the state's innovations. Toilets are decked out like local subway stations, and walls are adorned with Red Sox memorabilia and LPs by Boston-born Donna Summer. Because if there's one thing Bostonians are more proud of than their nation-shaping history, it's their baseball team.

But in a city so rooted in the past, what about the present? I head to the Massachusetts College of Art and Design (MassArt), to meet some of the bright young things busy sketching the Boston of today.

"I'd turn the lights on but they're burnt out," jokes printmaking student Daisy St Sauveur, as she clears some space on her ink-smeared, paper-strewn desk in her "lair". "At the moment, I'm working with the theme of American pop culture and the representation of women in the media," she explains, as I eye old magazine covers of Anna Nicole Smith and Britney Spears. Daisy looks like a bright slice of pop culture herself with her vintage sports jacket and banana-patterned T-shirt as she leafs through her portfolio of prints — all *Miami Vice* blues and pinks. I ask if she plans to move elsewhere after graduation. "Well, my allegiance is here now," she says, reflecting on the past three years. "The scene here has just changed so much — and for the better. It's more contemporary, and art here is no longer just the classic old oil paintings. I see Boston as a real collage of a city these days."

In many ways, MassArt reflects this versatility. The school, which was the first art college in the country to offer degrees in 1873, today caters to disciplines as diverse as stop-motion animation and art history. But despite its age, the college looks ever forwards in its role as Boston's foremost art school, with a new contemporary gallery set to open in 2020.

Illustration student Biana Bova also spares me five minutes from her manic schedule. "Sorry, it's a crazy time," she laughs, leading me to her desk. In the throes of finalising her portfolio for an exhibition, Biana is full of jumpy excitement. "There are opportunities galore in this city," she enthuses. "It's not cut-throat at all, which isn't the case in a city like New York. I know a bunch of us students who've got jobs at local galleries, and one guy I know has even started designing the cans for a local brewery."

Biana flicks through her fun digital illustrations, which pop with bright colours, before telling me about upcoming commissions, her YouTube channel and looming deadlines. If she's at all stressed, her enthusiasm does a good job of hiding it.

SMART ATTACK

It's not until I cross the choppy Charles River that I can really see Daisy's 'collage of a city'. From the river's northern edge, Boston spreads outwards and upwards: pockets of trees and the rowhouses of Beacon Hill, chimneys, steeples, domes; all backed by glassy high-rises. Here, I've officially stepped into Boston's annex city, Cambridge to meet Angele Maraj from Off The Beaten Path on a food-and-art-themed walk.

"Cambridge has had a bit of an identity crisis," she says. "Academic, residential, industrial — it's been a little bit of everything." A city of scholars, Cambridge first grew around the lawns of Harvard University, the first in the US when established in 1636. By the 19th century, the city had become one of New England's main hubs of industry and education, and a mixed population began moving in, from working-class migrants to middle-class academics. It's still a fabric that evidently defines Cambridge today as we walk along Massachusetts Avenue, passing falafel joints and Indian restaurants, bookshops and student hangouts.

After fuelling up on a grilled cheese sandwich at Roxy's, a local mini-franchise born out of a food truck start-up, we stop in front of a huge violet wall, embellished with

Sanskrit script the colour of hot embers. "It says 'greatness is measured by heart, not background'," Angele explains. "I like this one; it really sets the tone for Cambridge."

The city is awash with similarly vibrant art, from murals of multicultural gatherings to tarted-up street-side electricity cabinets. "Local students decorate these," Angele explains. "The authorities here don't want people to hide their art; they want to encourage people to tell their stories."

Next stop: Graffiti Alley, the only place in town where expressing yourself through the medium of an aerosol can is legal. "You've gotta spray with conviction," one of the artists tells me through his mouth mask. I give it a go, my peace sign ending up more of a kidney-shaped blob than anything else.

A little further south sits another of Boston's world-renowned universities, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), where I meet Mark Linga from the MIT List Visual Arts Center and admit it's a surprise to be at MIT in pursuit of art rather than science. Mark nods, almost forgivingly. "You're right; it's a bit of a surprise to most."

The Center opened in 1950 as the Hayden Gallery to curate and promote the growing collection of art at MIT. These days, exhibitions are held throughout the year, and pieces from its collection are loaned to students to display in their dorms.

"We like to think of this as Boston's hidden sculpture park," says Mark as he leads me around the campus. It's a treasure trail of modern masterpieces, a who's who of 20th-century creativity: there's Anthony Gormley's Chord, a molecular column that tumbles down an atrium; and Anish Kapoor's Non-Object (Plane), a giant concave mirror in the Ray and Maria Stata Center, a fantastical, Frank Gehry-designed building. Elsewhere are sculptures by Moore and Picasso, but perhaps most intriguing is Olafur Eliasson's Northwest Passage. Suspended from the ceiling, a series of glowing hoops cast yellow light onto amorphous, stainless steel panels.

"Interpret it how you like," says Mark as we crane our necks to admire it, "but you didn't even notice this when we walked past." He smiles. I hadn't, but now I'm transfixed by its abstract, slightly eerie form. "I think that's the point of this piece," Mark says. "Eliasson's addressing the melting Arctic ice. It's inconvenient, uncomfortable. We don't easily see it up there because we're so divorced from our place in nature."

Suddenly, I feel a twinge of guilt, staring up at myself in the mirror-like puddles. It's smart, clever. Apt art in this city of scholars.

INSIDER TIPS

The Institute of Contemporary Art has free entry after 5pm on Thursdays. It's also free entry at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum if it's your birthday, although if your name's Isabella, it's gratis year-round.

DigBoston is an alternative arts newspaper that includes local events listings. Pick up a free copy at street-side stands. *digboston.com*

Swan Boats, Public Garden
OPPOSITE PAGE FROM LEFT: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum; Institute of Contemporary Art

Boston's top 8 ART HOTSPOTS

INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART

BEST FOR: CUTTING-EDGE COOL

The nucleus of Boston's modern art scene cuts a boxy, modernist dash on the waterfront, as part of the ever-expanding Seaport District. ICA's main building hosts a calendar of thought-provoking exhibitions on all kinds of visual art but catch a water shuttle over to the ICA Watershed for large-scale installations. Don't miss the museum shop either, with its excellent art books, gadgets and gifts. *icaboston.org icastore.org*

ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM

BEST FOR: A CLASSIC COLLECTION

Taking its name from the bohemian, 19th-century art collector who once lived here, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum is set within a lavish, Venetian-style palazzo. The artwork on display includes Rembrandts, Titians and medieval stained glass, while the lush courtyard, filled with statues and colourful blooms, is just as beautiful as the art itself. *gardnermuseum.org*

FORT POINT ARTS COMMUNITY

BEST FOR: COMMUNITY SPIRIT

Stay in Seaport and you'll find an innovative community of over 300 artists scattered across the waterfront district, making it one of the largest and most diverse artistic collectives in New England. Stop by the Artists Bulding on Summer Street for guest-curated, mixed-media exhibitions, and check the FPAC website for October dates of the Open Studios, when the public can meet the artists at work. *fortpointarts.org*

BOSTON SCULPTORS GALLERY

BEST FOR: SCULPTURE VULTURES

Right in the heart of the SoWa Art + Design District, this sleek space on Harrison Avenue is one of the leading showcases of three-dimensional art in the city. Originally founded by 18 local sculptors in 1992, the gallery's grown to 37 members, so expect the cream of Boston-based talent here, both emerging and established, with monthly exhibitions (two artists exhibit per month). *bostonsculptors.com*

Q&A with Catherine Peterson, executive director, ArtsBoston

HAS BOSTON'S ART SCENE CHANGED IN RECENT YEARS?

The old view of Boston as a conservative city just doesn't hold true anymore. One example is the American Repertory Theater in Cambridge, which, under the leadership of Diane Paulus, is both sending a steady stream of award-winning productions to Broadway and providing a home for young artists and riskier shows.

WHAT SETS BOSTON'S ART SCENE APART FROM OTHER CITIES?

Boston has more performing arts organisations per capita than any other comparable US city outside of New York, and many of the performers come from Boston's multitude of universities and conservatories. You can see the stars of tomorrow perform in a musical at the Boston Conservatory at Berklee, or in an opera performed by Boston University or New England Conservatory students.

ANYTHING YOU RECOMMEND?

Staying with our universities, there are some real gems in the visual arts worth seeking out. In addition to the Harvard Art Museums, the Ethelbert Cooper Gallery of African and African American Arts on campus has terrific exhibitions.

ANY TOP TIPS TO MAKE THE MOST OF BOSTON'S ART SCENE?

The ArtsBoston Calendar at *artsboston.org* is an easy way to find out what's going on. I'd also recommend Instagram as a fun way to explore the art scene — check the #bosarts hashtag.

SoWa Open Market

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

BEST FOR: A HIGHBROW HIT

The fifth-largest museum in the US boasts a 450,000-strong collection of art works that's little short of staggering. Lose yourself along a timeline spanning ancient Egyptian artifacts to modern American art, via French post-impressionism, a number of Dutch masterpieces and the most extensive museum collection of Japanese works in the world outside Japan. *mfa.org*

PANOPTICON GALLERY

BEST FOR: STANDOUT SNAPS

Photography more your thing? Head to Panopticon, one of the oldest photography galleries in the US, opened in 1971. It offers a first-class showcase for photographic talent from across the globe, from the classic to the contemporary. It's changed locations a number of times in its near-50-year history, but you'll find it in the grand Hotel Commonwealth. *panopticongallery.com*

ROSE KENNEDY GREENWAY

BEST FOR: A WALK IN THE PARK

Back in the 1990s, traffic that had passed along a tangle of freeways and flyovers was diverted underground. Part of this disused highway is now the Greenway, a 1.5-mile ribbon of park that doubles as an open-air art gallery, displaying installations, sculptures and murals. Free events are also staged here year-round, from film screenings to exercise classes. *rosekennedygreenway.org*

SOMERVILLE

BEST FOR: NEIGHBOURHOOD VIBES

For some local flavour, make your way to this town to the northwest of Boston, where a former storage facility has been transformed into Bow Market — a hip collection of boutiques, studios and canteens. From there, jump on the bus to Davis Square and catch a film at the kitschy, independent cinema, Somerville Theatre. *bowmarketsomerville.com somervilletheatre.com*

ESSENTIALS

Getting there & around

Fly direct to Boston with American Airlines, British Airways, Delta and Virgin Atlantic from Heathrow; Norwegian from Gatwick; and Aer Lingus from Dublin. Delta also flies direct from Edinburgh and Dublin, and Virgin Atlantic from Manchester in the summer. *aa.com ba.com delta.com virginatlantic.com aerlingus.com norwegian.com*
Average flight time: 7h.
Boston is largely walkable, but its transport system, nicknamed the T, is extensive. Opt for a top-uppable CharlieCard, on which single fares are $1.70 (£1.30) on buses and $2.25 (£1.70) on the subway. *bta.com*

When to go

Spring and autumn average around 15-20C. Summers can peak in the high-20Cs, while the long New England winters can be snowy. Note that the city and its hotels are particularly busy around the Boston Marathon (20 April in 2020).

Places mentioned

Debby Krim. *dkrim.com*
SoWa. *sowaboston.com*
The Revolution Hotel. *therevolutionhotel.com*
MassArt. *massart.edu*
Daisy St Sauveur. *daisyst.com*
Biana Bova. *bianabova.com*
Off the Beaten Path Food Tours. *offthebeatenpathfoodtours.com*
MIT List Visual Arts Center. *listart.mit.edu*

More info

massholiday.co.uk
bostonusa.com
cambridgeusa.org

How to do it

NORWEGIAN offers direct return flights from Gatwick on its new Boeing 787 Dreamliners from £260. *norwegian.com*
THE REVOLUTION HOTEL has en suite doubles (called King and Queen rooms) from $150 (£119), room only. *therevolutionhotel.com*

ILLUSTRATION: JOHN PLUMER

THE IDEAL DAY IN NEGOMBO

Stay at Jetwing Blue and you'll be able to combine the Sri Lankan city's urban attractions with seaside relaxation

Morning

Start the day with a dip in the infinity pool before a breakfast of fresh fruit, pastries and egg hoppers. Then, hop on a bike to cycle along the Hamilton Canal — a Dutch-built waterway that weaves around the city and stop off for a juice and samosa at one of the villages along its banks. Next up, hail a tuk-tuk to Angurukaramulla Temple — a striking fortress with a Buddha at its centre and an ornate shrine room in its interior.

Afternoon

The sun's beating down and there's only one place you'll want to be — Negombo's beautiful beach; this sedate stretch of sand runs north from the town. The golden curve has rightfully gained a reputation for some of the town's best people-watching — of ice cream-licking locals, of guitar-strumming travellers, and excitable tots running in the shallows and scooping sand into palms.

Evening

If you're feeling lazy, pull up a chair at Black Coral for relaxed fine dining — a popular place that pulls in a fun crowd of food enthusiasts. Sri Lankan ingredients are at its core and the place buzzes until late. For something with a less-is-more ethos in a space that focuses on exceptional food and drink, head to Centre Point Grill and Bar at Jetwing Blue — the atmosphere is unpretentious and the food is delicious.

FOUR MORE CITY HOTELS

Jetwing Ayurveda Pavilions: Close to the Negombo shoreline, this Ayurvedic resort is spread across a pretty patchwork of courtyards and lush gardens.

Jetwing Beach: This beachfront pad has a superb spa as its centrepiece and toes-in-the-sand dining.

Jetwing Sea: Situated right on Negombo Beach, this contemporary space is crowned with a rooftop spa and has a restaurant with a reputation for serving up top-notch, delicious seafood.

Jetwing Lagoon: The 100-metre pool at this lagoon-side hotel is its ace card.

Essentials

Average flight time: 13h.
Jetwing Blue is just a 30-minute taxi ride from Colombo Airport.
jetwinghotels.com

Jetwing HOTELS SRI LANKA

To find out more, call +94 114 709400 or visit *jetwinghotels.com*

City life

ADELAIDE

Adelaide is basking in newfound glory. With a host of new hotels and airline routes, a thriving local music scene and two renowned wine regions on the laid-back city's doorstep, this is a city with mass appeal

WORDS: *Shaney Hudson* **PHOTOGRAPHS:** *Chris van Hove*

It's rare a city will catch you by surprise, but Adelaide likely will. For a long time, the Australian metropolis was overshadowed by Sydney, Melbourne and even Perth. Known as the City of Churches, it was no match for Australia's east coast cool or its west coast wealth. And yet what was once a second-tier capital city best known as a jumping-off point for Kangaroo Island, is a destination in its own right.

Both the Adelaide Hills and McLaren Vale wine regions are around a 45-minute drive from the CBD (Central Business District). From cellar doors to distilleries and farms to fine dining, tour operators, owners and growers have upped their game, with a new range of bespoke experiences available.

The ambitious d'Arenberg Cube in McLaren Vale made its mark on the international scene when it opened in a vineyard in December 2017. Part museum, part restaurant, part winery tasting room, the striking building — loosely resembling a Rubik's cube — could easily have been a white elephant, but instead it helped Adelaide recast itself as the city of wine.

The payoff of it all has begun: in the year to March 2018, the number of international visitors to South Australia increased by 9% to 475,000, while Adelaide itself has been in the spotlight for a number of high-profile awards. These include the 2018 Basque Culinary World Prize for chef Jock Zonfrillo, whose restaurant, Orana, claimed the top spot at the 2019 Good Food Guide Awards (Australia's equivalent of the Michelin Guide). This followed the city being named Australia's first UNESCO City of Music in 2015, in recognition of its thriving music scene.

Beyond the accolades, the city is also increasing its capacity to accommodate visitors. A new international terminal at Adelaide Airport is being built as an expanding number of international carriers begin to offer new routes to the city. A series of luxury hotels are under construction, too, including Sequoia at Mount Lofty House — set to become one of the city's most iconic designer hotels when it opens in December.

It's the relaxed feel that makes Adelaide distinct from any other Australian city. It's hard not to be envious of the lifestyle enjoyed by the locals here. Adelaide has the culture, nightlife and amenities of a big city, but the benefits of a regional food and wine scene on its doorstep — and there's never been a better time to discover it.

UPPERCASE
STUDIO"
Pemfords
WINE
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ARNOTT'S
FAMOUS
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TOMATO SAU
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SEE & DO

TANDANYA NATIONAL ABORIGINAL CULTURAL INSTITUTE: Aboriginal owned and managed, Tandanya is one of the best places to connect with indigenous culture in Adelaide. It contains a performance space, galleries and a gift shop stocked with authentic arts and crafts, while exhibitions focus on the modern indigenous experience, touching on a range of environmental and social justice issues. *tandanya.com.au*

ART GALLERY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA: Bold, progressive and exciting, the Art Gallery of South Australia arranges its collections thematically rather than according to established art movements (it also lets the artists scribble on the walls). Expect to see the largest collection of Rodins in the Southern Hemisphere, alongside a five-legged headless horse hanging from an oil rig and a red room woven with over 100 kilometres of wool. *artgallery.sa.gov.au*

MUSEUM OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA: As well as being home to everything from an 11-metre giant squid suspended in a darkened, disused lift shaft to a stunning opalised dinosaur fossil, the Museum of South Australia showcases the biggest collection of Aboriginal Australian artifacts in the world, highlighting the incredible depth and diversity of indigenous culture across Australia. *samuseum.sa.gov.au*

MOUNTY LOFTY SUMMIT: The mountaintop lookout offers stunning views of the Fleurieu Peninsula and the ocean beyond. Keep an eye out for wild koalas in the trees — largely unnoticed by visitors passing below. *mountloftysummit.com*

ADELAIDE CENTRAL MARKET: The biggest covered market in the Southern Hemisphere is the perfect place to get a feel for what makes produce in South Australia so special. Don't miss the Indigenous food stall and for an insider's perspective, consider taking a guided tour of the market with Food Tours Australia. *ausfoodtours.com adelaidecentralmarket.com.au*

WINE COUNTRY: Adelaide has two spectacular wine regions: Adelaide Hills and McLaren Vale. The former is renowned for its small farms and sophisticated cellar-door experiences, as well as the 'German town' of Hahndorf, Australia's oldest surviving German settlement. Located by the coast, McLaren Vale (home to the d'Arenberg cube) is best known for its Shiraz. To get there, rent a car, or take a wine tour with Coast & Co that includes 4x4 drive along the beach. *coastandco.com.au*

MAGILL ESTATE CELLAR DOOR: Five miles from the CBD, this wine estate dates back to 1844 and is home to one of the world's few urban vineyards. While here, take a tour of the barrel and fermenting rooms, with tastings and lunch available at the historic cellar door. *penfolds.com*

EAT

£ SHO: This eight-seater yakitori (grilled chicken served on a skewer) bar is part of Japanese restaurant Shobosho. Alongside this main snack, it also serves dumplings and ramen, with beer and Suntory whisky highballs on tap. *shobosho.com.au*

££ OSTERIA OGGI: Book ahead for a meal at popular modern Italian restaurant Osteria Oggi, where the pasta is handmade and served at communal tables, the aperitif selection is inspiring, and the espresso among the best in the city. *osteriaoggi.com.au*

£££ ORANA: Fine dining restaurant Orana showcases the cuisine of acclaimed chef Jock Zonfrillo — Scottish born with Italian roots and a passion for Australian produce. The tasting menu draws heavily on native seasonal ingredients sourced by indigenous communities throughout Australia, while standout dishes on the tasting menu have included emu with wild plum and mountain pepper. *restaurantorana.com*

***Progressive state** // South Australia was the first colony in the country to give women the vote (1894). Three years later, Catherine Helen Spence became the first female political candidate*

PREVIOUS PAGES: East End
FROM LEFT: 'The Mall's Balls', Rundle Mall; kitchen, Osteria Oggi; Adelaide Bar Boys tour

AFTER HOURS

THE GOV: At this live music venue, the Front Bar hosts everything from the Adelaide Ukulele Appreciation Society to open mic sessions, while the Venue, its larger space, attracts big-name acts. *thegov.com.au*

ADELAIDE BAR BOYS: The company offers tours of Adelaide's bar scene — stops include a speakeasy hidden behind a fireplace (Lindes Lane) and a bar with board games (BrainHackr: Board Game Bar & Cafe). Drinks and food included. *adelaidebarboys.com.au*

WEST END: Head to the West End for two of Adelaide's nightlife hotspots. On Leigh Street, pop into Pink Moon Saloon's House of Fire & Drink — a Scandi-style hut. Peel Street, meanwhile, is home to a number of small bars, including Maybe Mae, a speakeasy located in the basement of Bread & Bone wood grill. *maybemae.com*
pinkmoonsaloon.com.au

Walking trail leading to Mount Lofty Lookout
RIGHT, FROM TOP: d'Arenberg Cube, McLaren Vale; mirin-cured kingfish, sesame, nectarine and yolk, The Lane Vineyard

LIKE A LOCAL

ON TWO WHEELS: Adelaide's CBD is surrounded by a ring of green spaces — and free bikes are available throughout the city centre. A popular route to the northern suburbs heads along Frome Street and across the river, past the zoo, where giraffes can often be seen craning their necks over the fence at rush hour. *bikesa.asn.au*

SLICE OF LIFE: Grab a coffee and a bite at Lucia's Pizza and Spaghetti Bar at Adelaide Market, one of the oldest cafes in the city and also the first place in Adelaide to serve pizza back in the 1950s. *lucias.com.au*

TIME FOR A TIPPLE: Occupying 207 acres in the Adelaide Hills, Lot 100 comprises five local producers, making cider, wine, fruit juice, craft beer, and gin and whisky, respectively. There's a tasting space-cum-restaurant that specialises in Italian-inspired cuisine, and visitors can picnic on sprawling lawns. *lot100.com.au*

BUY

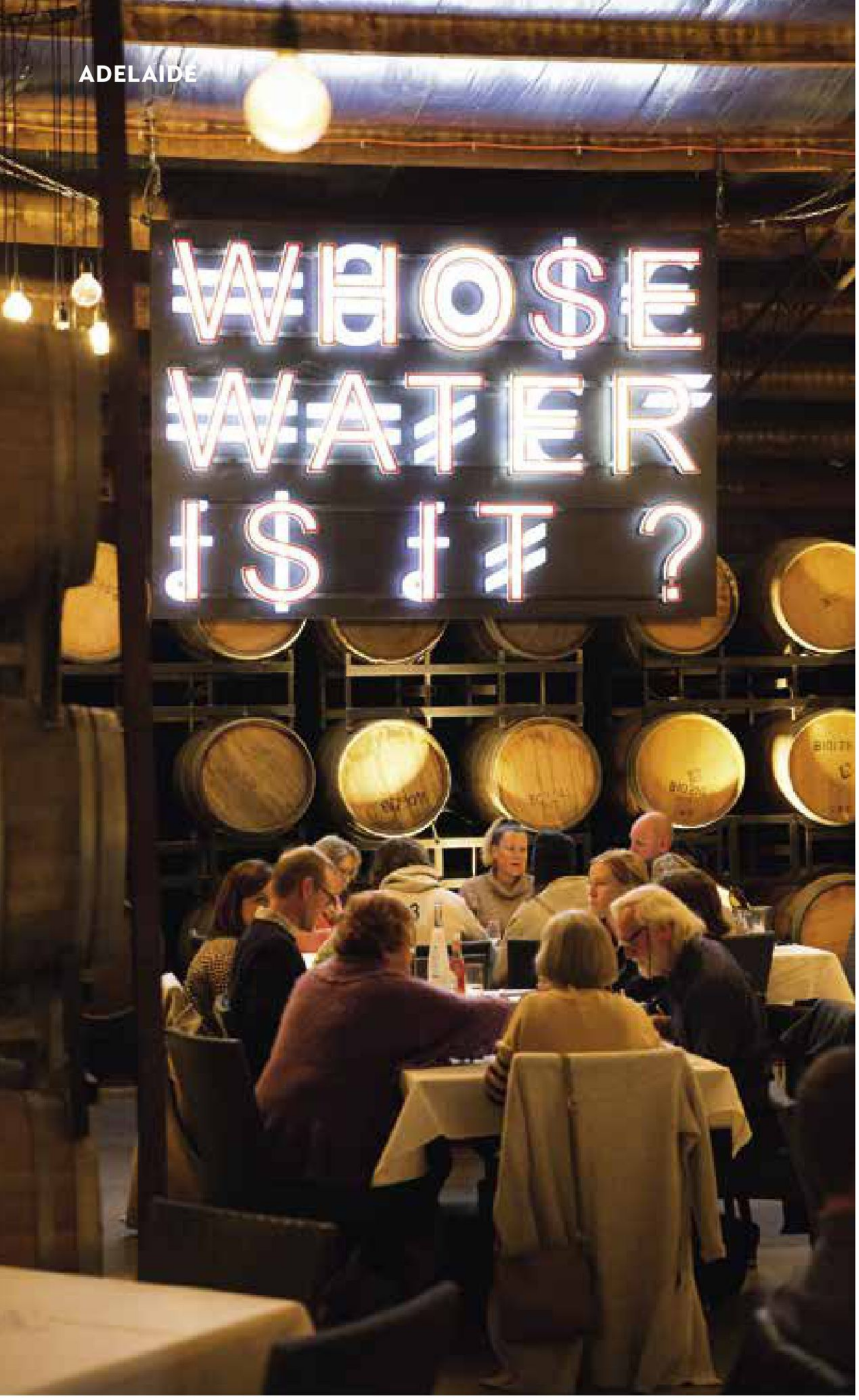
RUNDLE MALL: As well as being the city's main shopping district, Rundle Mall, in the CBD, is home to some quirky street art, including life-size brass pigs and the 'Mall's Balls', two reflective steel spheres stacked one on top of the other. *rundlemall.com*

HAIGH'S CHOCOLATES: Australia's oldest family-owned chocolate producer, Haigh's selection boxes make the perfect gift option for friends, family and colleagues — if they make it home. Our pick? The giant milk peppermint chocolate frogs. *haighschocolates.com.au*

ADELAIDE ARCADE: Opened in 1885, Adelaide Arcade is home to a number of small businesses (cobblers, coffee shops and button sellers) and a museum displaying local artifacts. *adelaidearcade.com.au*

EAST END: Located between Frome Street and East Terrace, the East End is home to boutique ateliers, local fashion houses, charity shops and vintage clothing stores, as well as a lively selection of street art and small bars and cafes. *eastendadelaide.com.au*

Picture of health *// The Royal Adelaide Hospital is the city's hot topic, costing a cool A$2.44bn (£1.34bn). As Australia's most expensive building, rest assured that if you happen to need medical attention on your travels, your care will be state of the art*



ABOVE: Bird in Hand Winery, Adelaide Hills

SLEEP

£ IBIS STYLES ADELAIDE GROSVENOR: Expect top-notch facilities as well as clean, functional guest rooms and an excellent location on North Terrace, near the train station, museum and gallery. *ibisstylesadelaidegrosvenor.com.au*

£££ MAJESTIC ROOFTOP GARDEN: Situated near the vibrant East End, rooms at the Majestic Rooftop Garden are refreshingly classic, with no unnecessary design flourishes. Instead, the focus is on comfort (king-size beds in every room) and efficient, fuss-free service. *roofgardenhotel.com.au*

£££ MAYFAIR HOTEL: Guests at the Mayfair can enjoy honey from the hotel's rooftop hives as part of their breakfast, a free mini-bar stocked with bottles from Hills Cider Co. Cider, and a 13th-floor rooftop bar with stunning views across the city. *mayfairhotel.com.au*

ESSENTIALS

Getting there & around

Qantas flies direct from London to Perth with connections to Adelaide. Emirates, Cathay Pacific, Qatar Airways, Singapore Airlines, Malaysia Airlines and China Southern Airlines all offer connections from London.
qantas.com emirates.com cathaypacific.com qatarairways.com singaporeair.com malaysiaairlines.com csair.com
Average flight time: 23h.

Adelaide is known as the '20-minute city', as most key sites are no more than 20 minutes from one another. During the day, free public hire bikes are widely available, while a free City Connector bus service covers the centre and north, and a free tram runs between the South Terrace and Festival Plaza. The A$25 (£14) Visitor Pass grants three days unlimited travel on trains, trams and buses. *adelaidemetro.com.au bikesa.asn.au*

When to go

With its Mediterranean climate, Adelaide is a great year-round destination, although summer (December-February) can be very hot, hitting 35C. Spring (September-November) and autumn (March-May) are best, with temperatures in the low 20Cs. Winters average around 16C.
The Adelaide Festival, Adelaide Fringe and WOMADelaide festival take place in February/March, one of the busiest times for the city. *festivalsadelaide.com.au*

More info

Lonely Planet South Australia & Northern Territory. RRP: £15.99.
southaustralia.com

How to do it

EXPEDIA has three nights at the Mayfair Hotel, including return flights with Singapore Airlines from Heathrow from £1,305 per person.
expedia.co.uk

ILLUSTRATION: JOHN PLUMER

MATORIN FLOATING HOUSE

Photo: Matia Ščukovt

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2019

Big Sleep Awards

Exceptional service? Menus to die for? Boudoirs fit for Sleeping Beauty? Whatever it is that truly makes a hotel special, we're celebrating it in our annual awards, where we reward the best new tastemakers, trendsetters and game-changers in the business

IMAGE: NIKOLOZ PANIASHVILI

THE WINNERS

CITY SLICKER
RAFFLES EUROPEJSKI WARSAW

HANGOUT
STAMBA HOTEL, TBILISI

LORD OF THE MANOR
HECKFIELD PLACE, HAMPSHIRE

WELLNESS WONDER
THE RETREAT AT BLUE LAGOON, ICELAND

DESIGN DEN
MORPHEUS, MACAU

BREATH OF FRESH AIR
SHIPWRECK LODGE, NAMIBIA

CLEAN & GREEN
SHINTA MANI WILD, CAMBODIA

GAME-CHANGER
THE ANNEX, TORONTO

CASTAWAY
ISLAS SECAS, PANAMA

GOURMET GETAWAY
BLESS HOTEL, MADRID

GRAND REDESIGNS
HÔTEL LUTETIA, PARIS

BOUTIQUE BREAK
THE FIFE ARMS, BRAEMAR

LOVE SHACK
CAN BORDOY GRAND HOUSE & GARDEN, PALMA DE MALLORCA

ON THE MONEY
ALILA BANGSAR, KUALA LUMPUR

SNOW QUEEN
EXPERIMENTAL CHALET, VERBIER

COMEBACK KID
PARAMOUNT HOUSE HOTEL, SYDNEY

THE JUDGING PANEL

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***NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER* (UK) TEAM**

City Slicker

We wanted to find the ultimate urban nest. Who's the new girl in town? Or is there a chain that's really turning heads? After a hard day's exploring, here's where we'll want to rest our weary bones

RAFFLES EUROPEJSKI WARSAW

OUR PANEL SAID: Why has it taken luxury brands so long to wake up to the Polish capital? This grande dame, dating from 1857 when it opened as the Hotel Europejski, has been given some much-needed pizzazz by Raffles, and the result is every bit as sumptuous as you'd expect. The glamorous, sensitive restoration offers the largest rooms and suites in the city, a lavish patisserie, intriguing Polish art, and the Europejski Grill, where a considered array of national favourites are served up in style. But don't skip what must be Warsaw's poshest spa, where the walls twinkle with 1960s mosaics and products come courtesy of Sisley. *raffles.com/warsaw*

Raffles Europejski Warsaw

IMAGES: PIOTR GESICKI; ©RAFFLES EUROPEJSKI WARSAW

Runners-up

THE MIDDLE HOUSE, SHANGHAI
Set in the heart of downtown just off Nanjing Road, the Middle House is a sensual city retreat. Dotted with an art collection MoMA would envy, rooms come with dark wooden floors, porcelain headboards and smoky tones, and the restaurants and bars are superb. *themiddlehousehotel.com*

UNITED PLACES, MELBOURNE
This sleek spot on the edge of the Royal Botanic Gardens delivers understated style in spades — contemporary architecture, cool hues and gorgeous tactile touches like concrete walls and obsidian bathtubs. *unitedplaces.com.au*

Hangout

If you lived nearby, you'd be here all the time — a place you can't wait to show your friends, where the cocktails are snazzy and the DJ spins the best tunes

STAMBA HOTEL, TBILISI

OUR PANEL SAID: An old Soviet printing house catapulted into the 21st century, Stamba makes a lasting impression. Its big, brutalist skeleton has been injected with all the creativity that's coursing through the Georgian capital's veins right now — floor-to-ceiling bookshelves dominate the design, minibars come with cocktail kits, and faintly art deco touches meld with all that bold concrete. But it's the effortless cool that makes Stamba stand out: there's an 'amphitheatre' performance space for concerts, a photo museum curating the best local and international photographic talent, the pastel-pretty Pink Bar, an on-site coffee roastery and Café Stamba, where you'll be queuing with the locals for a cheesy khachapuri. *stambahotel.com*

Runners-up

NOMAD, LOS ANGELES

The old Bank of Italy was one of Downtown's grandest buildings when it opened in 1923, but today it's one of the city's most happening hotels. There's a landmark restaurant, swish cocktail bar and a rooftop pool with views as far as the Pacific. *thenomadhotel.com*

THE LINE, AUSTIN

Paying homage to its roots as a jazz club, The Line is an extremely good-looking neighbourhood hangout for anyone with a love of music and good times. Whether for frozen margaritas in the lakeside infinity pool or intimate gigs in the rooftop bar, The Line knows how to draw you in. *thelinehotel.com/austin*

LEFT FROM TOP: Aviator Room, Stamba Hotel; Pink Bar, Stamba Hotel

IMAGE: @HELGALAUFEYPHOTOS

Wellness wonder

Plenty of places offer R&R, but some do it better than others. We want to dissolve our worries in the Jacuzzi, have those knots in our necks massaged away and come back feeling like a new person

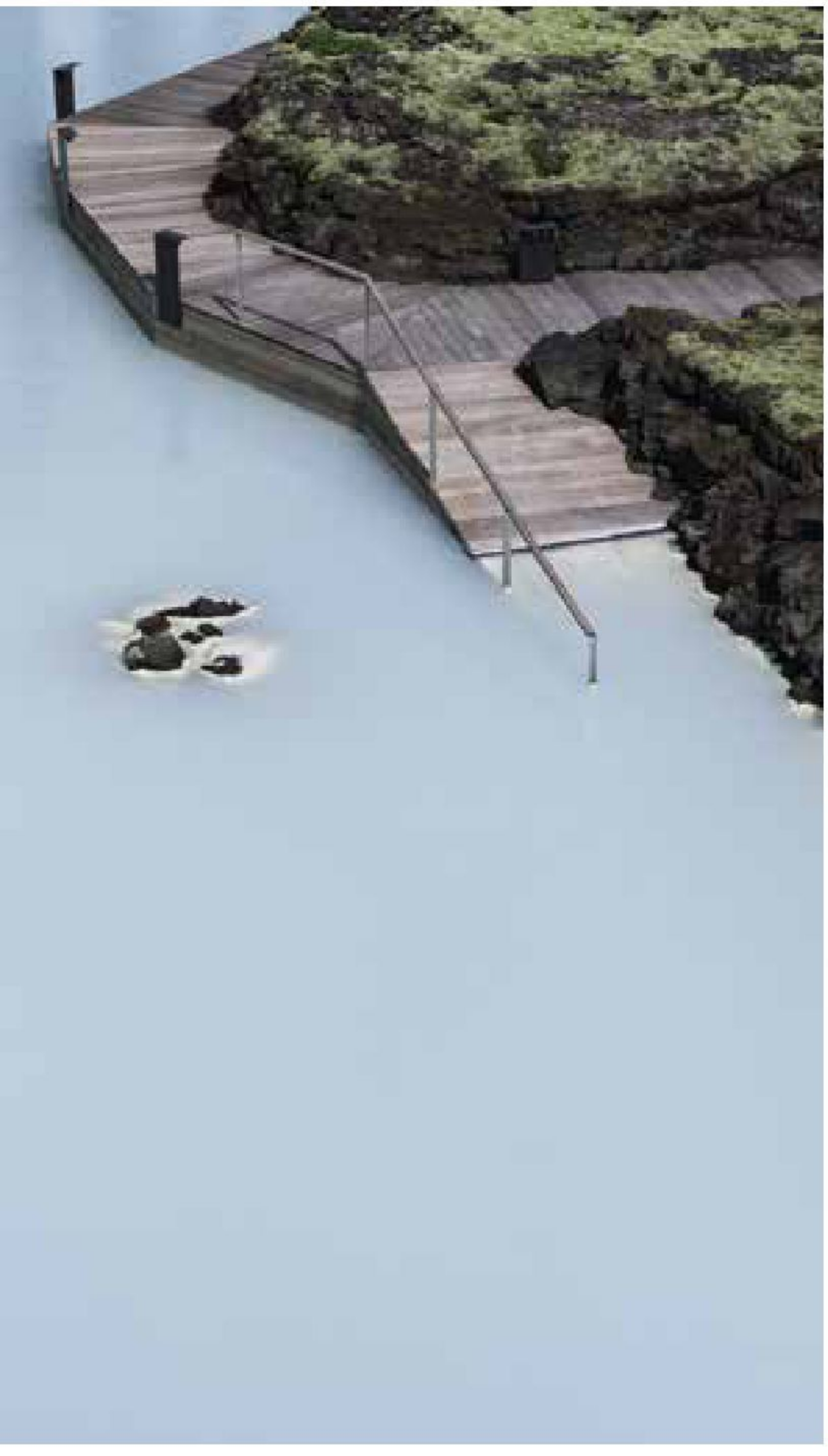
THE RETREAT AT BLUE LAGOON, ICELAND

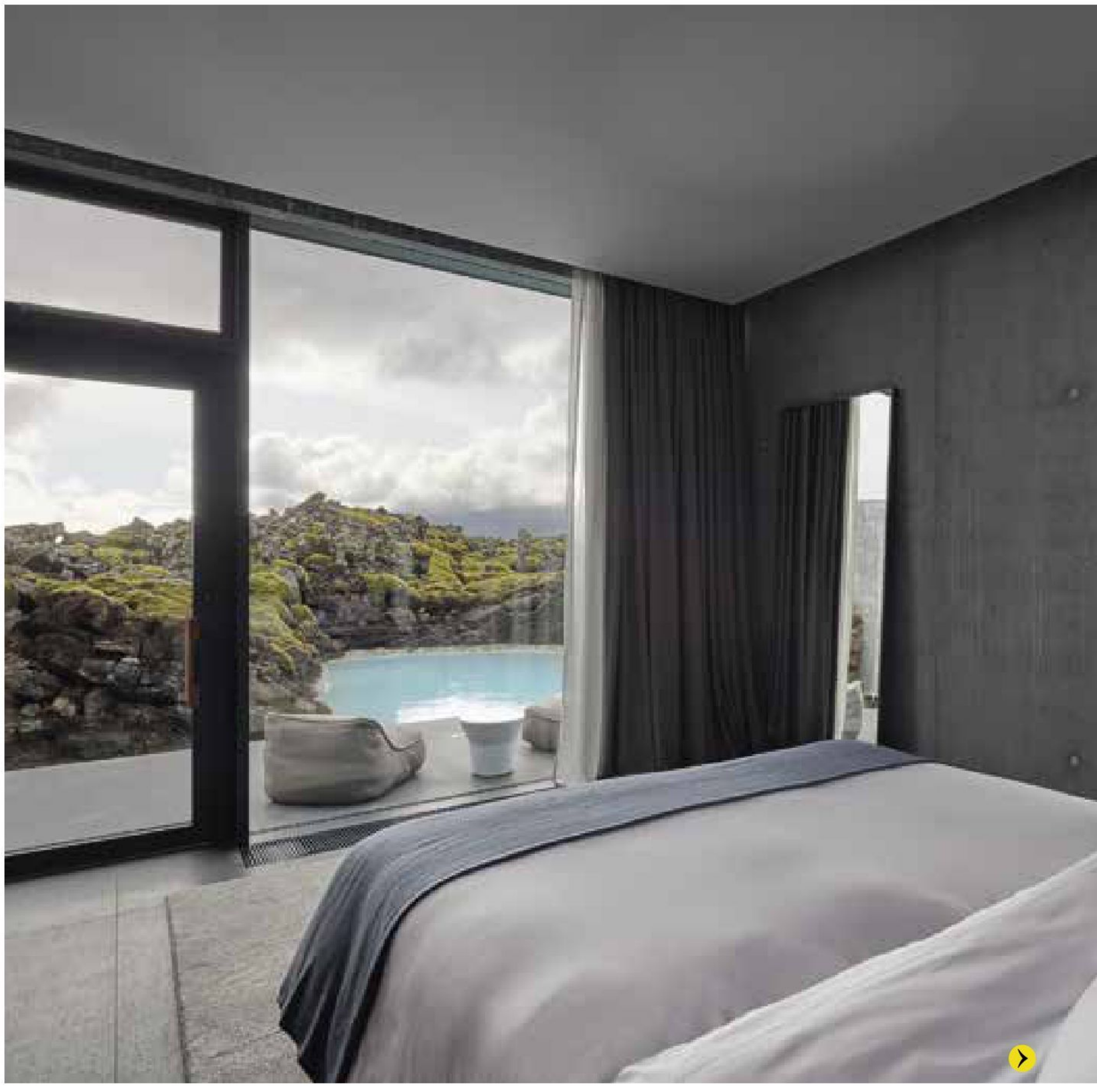
OUR PANEL SAID: Who knew hot water could be so cool? Last year, Iceland's steaming Blue Lagoon completed a significant expansion, opening The Retreat at Blue Lagoon — a minimalist sanctuary of wellness right on the edge of the country's most famous landmark. The star of the show is, of course, its subterranean spa, built into the jet-black, 800-year-old lava flows, where the Lagoon's salt, silica and algae take a starring role in the treatment offerings. In addition, there's a restaurant that reimagines Iceland's culinary traditions as well as 62 suites encircled by those pearly, mineral-rich waters. *bluelagoon.com*

Runners-up

EUPHORIA RETREAT, MYSTRAS, GREECE
This pretty, pine-scented getaway in the Peloponnese does Hellenic-inspired wellness par excellence. Nutrition takes a leading role here, with a lengthy list of first-class facilities, too: a Himalayan salt room and a traditional hammam to name a few. *euphoriaretreat.com*

BHUTAN SPIRIT SANCTUARY
Set high in the Himalayas with just 22 rooms, this is wellness at the highest level — meditation with monks, yoga and Tibetan massages — and guests can even join therapists on a forage for ingredients to be used in their treatments. *bhutanspiritsanctuary.com*





BELOW FROM LEFT: Exterior, The Retreat at Blue Lagoon; bedroom, The Retreat at Blue Lagoon

Design den

It's amazing what architects can dream up, so we wanted to reward the very best when it comes to aesthetics: the cleverly conceived and the bewitchingly boundary-pushing

MORPHEUS, MACAU

OUR PANEL SAID: One of the last buildings designed by the late Zaha Hadid, Morpheus (at the City of Dreams complex) is more than just a design den, it's a marker for all future hotel architecture. It feels like a living, breathing creature. Its exterior is a silvery slab wrapped in an exoskeleton, pierced with gigantic holes, while inside, contemporary pieces of art abound. There are curves and bends, webs of drooping glass, vast floating platforms and lipstick-red-glass elevators zooming up and down the walls like something from an '80s video game. Spectacular. *cityofdreamsmacau.com*

Runners-up

ROOMS OF ROME, ROME
Fashion icon Alda Fendi's treatment of an 18th-century palazzo defies easy categorisation. Its 24 apartments are designed by Jean Nouvel, and stellar art takes centre stage. *theroomsofrome.com*

CAPELLA UBUD, BALI
Flintstones-esque infinity pools and a colonial-chic cocktail tent: Bill Bensley's creation is a bonkers-brilliant blend of Balinese design and hipster glamping, deep in the heart of lush, green rainforest. *capella hotels.com*

FROM LEFT: Guest room, Morpheus, Macau; cabins, Shipwreck Lodge; cabin interior, Shipwreck Lodge

Breath of fresh air

Ah, the great outdoors — but back-to-nature needn't mean slumming it under the stars. Glampsites, decked-out yurts, safari lodges, geodesic domes and luxury cabins. Where would you choose to bed down?

SHIPWRECK LODGE, NAMIBIA

OUR PANEL SAID: The remote, desolate Skeleton Coast makes a dramatic setting for the standalone cabins of Shipwreck Lodge. Marooned on windswept dunes, attention turns first to the lodge's design: the angular, solar-powered cabins' quirky shape is inspired by the ships that came to grief along this notorious Atlantic coastline. And being this remote, the outdoors takes centre stage: rare species of flora and fauna, sea breezes and starry night skies. This isn't just a true get-away-from-it-all retreat but a remarkable example of how accommodation can thrive in the most unlikely of destinations. *shipwrecklodge.com.na*

IMAGE: CREATIVELAB

Runners-up

COLLECTIVE HILL COUNTRY, TEXAS

This is rustic, Texan-style glamping with a dash of luxury — decadent tented hideaways with en suites and wood-burning stoves, with the chance to get out and discover the great outdoors on horseback. *collectiveretreats.com*

WA ALE ISLAND RESORT, MYANMAR

Set on the Mergui Archipelago, Wa Ale is both eco-friendly and luxurious. The 11 tented villas and two treehouses, set in a 9,000-acre wildlife reserve surrounded by the Andaman Sea, offer an off-radar slice of paradise. *waaleresort.com*

Clean & green

Is it making a positive community impact? Has it gone carbon neutral? A hotel's eco credentials are a big part of its guest appeal, something these sustainable sanctuaries have taken to heart

SHINTA MANI WILD, CAMBODIA

OUR PANEL SAID: Hotel designer Bill Bensley is a green go-getter who has safeguarded an 865-acre patch of pristine Cambodian rainforest from mining and logging for this eco-tourism endeavour. Opened last December with 15 exclusive tents peppered along the Tmor Rung river valley, it has a 1960s jungle safari vibe, with decorations including faded carousel horses and antique ship lanterns. This is a green beacon of conservation, where at least 75% of staff are locals, tents are suspended to allow migratory movements below, and experiences include patrolling the jungle with Wildlife Alliance rangers. *shintamani.com*

Runners-up

VALSANA, AROSA, SWITZERLAND
Skiing and 'green' don't usually make happy bedfellows, but this stylish number is a breath of fresh mountain air. It's the first Swiss hotel to have an ice battery and the restaurant, Twist, serves organic vino. *valsana.ch*

ANDBEYOND TENGILE RIVER LODGE, SOUTH AFRICA
This safari pad merges eco-technology with upcycled materials. Stone and sleepers salvaged from the Selati Railway have been turned into flooring and cladding, while the roofs are covered in sand for minimal impact on the surrounding area. *andbeyond.com*

Game-changer

Some hotels aren't afraid to take a risk by trying something different — but only a few get it right

THE ANNEX, TORONTO

OUR PANEL SAID: This hotel is all about getting out and about in the local area. No room service means you'll have to head out for breakfast, no on-site parking means jumping on public transport, and check-in is done digitally in advance. Minimalist boudoirs have big beds, and there's plenty of local art, music and food collaborations that testify to the eclectic spirit of this part of town. *theannex.com*

Runners-up

UNIVERSITY ARMS, CAMBRIDGE
There was a buzz about this place before it even opened — and for good reason. It's pepped up the city's hotel scene and a table at the hotel's Parker's Tavern is the hottest ticket in town. *universityarms.com*

TWA HOTEL, NEW YORK
Based at John F Kennedy International Airport, this 512-room hotel has an observation deck, museum and rooftop pool. Dating from 1962, Eero Saarinen's original TWA terminal has been reborn as the lobby, while rooms offer exhilarating views of the runways. *twahotel.com*

Castaway

From barefoot, beachfront villas to stilted cabins on a private island, we'd happily be stranded on these desert island retreats, where you can truly get away from it all

ISLAS SECAS RESERVE & LODGE, PANAMA

OUR PANEL SAID: Escapes don't get much more castaway than this. Opened earlier in the year, amid the jade-green, tropical waters and rocky islands of Panama's Gulf of Chiriquí, this retreat has a colourful, Neverland-esque history of shipwrecks and buccaneers. Nine ocean-view *casitas* make up this desert island dream, each clustered around a private pool, and days can be spent doing yoga, fishing, or heading off in search of the archipelago's abundant wildlife, including manta rays, sea turtles and frigate birds. *islassecas.com*

Runners-up

JOALI, MALDIVES
Nowhere says paradise quite like the Maldives, and this resort in the Raa Atoll does more than enough to keep up the islands' reputation, with its blissfully blue waters, outdoor baths, thatched villas and exceptional service. *joali.com*

ZURI ZANZIBAR, TANZANIA
This getaway on Tanzania's 'Spice Island' is the ultimate in idyllic island escapes. Expect fine seafood, hammocks, and a picture-perfect spot on the island's calm northwestern shores. *zurizanzibar.com*

FROM LEFT: Shinta Mani Wild; Islas Secas Reserve & Lodge

Lord of the manor

The best rural retreats are beacons of hospitality, featuring classy design, top-notch service and glorious cuisine, all the while honouring their heritage

HECKFIELD PLACE, HAMPSHIRE

OUR PANEL SAID: This might just be the perfect reimagining of a country house hotel. The revamped, 17th-century Georgian mansion overlooks groomed parkland, and with breezily cool interiors by Ben Thompson (protege of designer Ilse Crawford), a cinema, organic farm and an impressive cultural calendar, it all equals laid-back country style for the 21st century. A huge draw is the hotel's food: superior home cooking under the creative culinary direction of chef Skye Gyngell. Expect produce from the grounds, and heartfelt hospitality at residents-only restaurant, Hearth. *heckfiedplace.com*

Runners-up

THE LANGLEY, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE
Guests will feel like nobility at the Duke of Marlborough's former country pile, now a supremely chic, 41-room Georgian country escape, complete with extensive grounds and a world-class spa. *marriott.co.uk*

CHÂTEAU LAFAURIE-PEYRAGUEY, BORDEAUX
The transformation of this 18th-century wine estate into a luxurious hotel has seen a careful restoration, involving spectacular chandeliers and the creation of a sumptuous restaurant. *lafauriepeyragueylalique.com*

IMAGE: WWW.ROBERTOCASTANO.COM

FROM LEFT: Heckfield Place; grilled octopus on pepper puree, Etxeko restaurant, Bless Hotel

Gourmet getaways

Hotel kitchens sparkle with some of the world's greatest culinary talent. We ate our way through taster menus, Michelin-starred delicacies and seasonal ingredients to bring you the cream of the crop

BLESS HOTEL, MADRID

OUR PANEL SAID: Martín Berasategui may be Spain's most decorated chef (he's accrued a dazzling 10 Michelin stars to date), but his ventures in the Spanish capital have been scarce until now. At his new restaurant, Etxeko, dishes are inspired by his native Basque Country — gazpacho; grilled octopus on pepper puree; and dry-aged Txuleta beef with bone marrow and piquillo peppers, for instance — all served up amid handsome crimson banquettes and mosaic floors. And if you need to lie down after dinner, Bless will see to that with its spacious, refined boudoirs. *blesscollectionhotels.com*

Runners-up

D'UNE ÎLE, NORMANDY
Along with Théo Pourriat, Bertrand Grébaut — from Paris restaurant Septime — transformed a French country house into a show-stopper of a restaurant with rooms that champions rustic, regional produce. *duneile.com*

BLACK BULL, SEDBURGH
Hyper-local yet audaciously worldly: Manchester street food stalwarts Nina Matsunaga and James Ratcliffe bring Asian culinary flair to a chic 17th-century inn on the Cumbria-Yorkshire border. *theblackbullsedbergh.co.uk*

Paris skyline
BELOW: Hotel Lutetia

Grand redesigns

Some hotels are destinations in their own right, and these institutions — the big-hitters and the grandes dames— have got all dolled up and are now back in business

HOTEL LUTETIA, PARIS

OUR PANEL SAID: Four years and €200 million (£180 million) after closing for renovation, the Left Bank's leading lady reopened her art nouveau doors last summer. In a city where five-star hotels are par for the course, the Lutetia stands out for heritage alone, having ushered in everyone from Picasso to Pitt, Joyce to Jagger. Its new generation of guests can nod off in one of 184 contemporary-styled rooms and suites, take a dip in the marble pool, or sip a cocktail at the beautiful Bar Joséphine, replete with restored ceiling frescoes. Mark our words — this is a new benchmark for hotels a la parisienne. *hotellutetia.com*

Runners-up

MANDARIN ORIENTAL HYDE PARK, LONDON
Everything from its rooms to its restaurants (one of which is Dinner by Heston Blumenthal) have been redone with plenty of panache in the biggest refurbishment in the hotel's 117-year history. *mandarinoriental.com*

THE DATAI LANGKAWI, MALAYSIA
Following a $60 million (£47.9 million) makeover, the island getaway is back with a bang. New features include extended restaurants, spa pavilions, a nature centre and three additional rainforest pool villas. *thedatai.com*

IMAGES: SIM CANETTY-CLARKE

Boutique break

Behold the Fabergé eggs of the hotel world: perfectly proportioned, stylishly designed and, of course, singled out for their top-notch service

THE FIFE ARMS, BRAEMAR

OUR PANEL SAID: With feted art dealers Hauser & Wirth at the helm, expect the extravagant at this former hunting lodge once visited by Queen Victoria: lavish wallpaper, tasteful touches of Victoriana and a stag suspended from the ceiling. Not that it's style over substance here — the hotel's 46 bedrooms are all uniquely designed, each one inspired by the heritage of the surrounding area and brought to life with a collection of more than 14,000 carefully selected antiques, artworks and furnishings. Mountain views abound, Scottish pub classics are served at the bar, and there's even a bijou spa in which to recover after a hike in the hills. Cue the bagpipes — this Highland bolthole hits all the right notes. *thefifearms.com*

Runners-up

PALAZZO BOZZI CORSO, LECCE
With interiors by Laboratoire Design Rabat, this 18th-century baroque palazzo is a dazzling new design hotel in Italy's southern Puglia. The gleaming chrome bar is the place to be for cocktail o'clock, and morning coffee is served in the 10-bedroom property's 'secret' garden. *palazzobozzicorso.com*

HOTEL AMPARO, SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE
With original touches, pared-back design and splashes of bold, colourful textiles, this chic, five-room addition to the Mexican town's hotel scene is boutique bliss at its understated best. *hotelamparo.com*

Love shack

Romantic retreats that have it all — hammocks for two, private plunge pools or honeymoon suites that'd make Casanova blush

CAN BORDOY GRAND HOUSE & GARDEN, PALMA DE MALLORCA

OUR PANEL SAID: Romance has an address in Palma's beautiful old town. Full of baroque and gothic charm, this majestic addition to the Majorcan capital is the ultimate urban love nest, with regal rooms, gorgeous old-meets-new aesthetics and butler service. A soak in the heated pool is a must, and the walled garden is a secluded suntrap worthy of Romeo-and-Juliet-style serenades. *canbordoy.com*

Runners-up

GARA ROCK, DEVON
Need to escape it all? This discreetly nautical-inspired escape on the dramatic south Devon coast serves up chic, cosy rooms, fresh seafood, a spa and superb sea views to boot. *gararock.com*

PALAZZO DANIELE, PUGLIA
This 19th-century palace has been turned into an achingly pretty hideaway hotel. A warren of courtyards and cosy nooks, this is real, barefoot romance without the schmaltz and rose petals. *palazzodaniele.com*

FROM LEFT: The Fife Arms

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On the money

Coming in at under £150 a night, these rooms deliver serious bang for your buck without scrimping on comfort, style or service

ALILA BANGSAR, KUALA LUMPUR

OUR PANEL SAID: Set atop a domino of black glass in Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur's hippest neighbourhood, the Alila Bangsar has everything you could want from an inner-city sanctum: 360-degree city views, a rooftop pool, top-quality restaurants and minimalist rooms that look like they've been pulled straight from the pages of a design magazine. A stay here won't break the bank, either — rates are remarkably affordable for a hotel of this standard and location, with studios starting from as little as £65, B&B. *alilahotels.com*

Runners-up

THE COW HOLLOW HOTEL, MANCHESTER
What might just be the city's coolest opening this year is also a steal. A room in the warehouse turned urban nest — with creature comforts aplenty — is yours for just £85 a night. *cowhollow.co.uk*

CITIZENM, COPENHAGEN
Bright, brilliant and a little bit brash, this young hotel chain's bold design is always a winner. But the key to this Scandi success? Beds for £110 in the notoriously steep Danish capital. *citizenm.com*

IMAGE: MELODY SKY

Verbier, Switzerland
LEFT: Alila Bangsar

Snow queen

After a day hitting the slopes or hiking across glaciers, we want to return to a true winter palace with roaring fires, mountain views and an apres-ski experience that's second to none

EXPERIMENTAL CHALET, VERBIER

OUR PANEL SAID: Laid-back and clubby, this sparkling opening in the Swiss Alps is about as urban-cool as ski hotels gets — an off-shoot of a boutique brand that began life in Paris as a speakeasy bar. Emblematic of the new-era luxe hotels that are blossoming across Europe's smarter ski resorts, this new take on mountain luxury is decked out in bright tiles and muted velvets — banish all thoughts of traditional tasselled curtains and silver-service dining. Its buzzy brasserie is fronted by Gregory Marchand, a Jamie Oliver protege, and an airy cocktail bar graces the first floor. *experimentalchalet.com*

Runners-up

SHELDON CHALET, ALASKA
Set high on a glacial outcrop, Alaska's poshest ski pad comes with wrap-around windows that make the most of its remote setting in Denali National Park. *sheldonchalet.com*

CALDERA HOUSE, JACKSON HOLE, WYOMING
This wintry hideaway nestled beneath the mountains of Jackson Hole is one of several smart new openings within the elite US resort. Expect an ultra-modern, eight-suite lodge with a plush, Wild West aesthetic. *calderahouse.com*

Paramount House Hotel
RIGHT: Exterior of Paramount House Hotel

Comeback kid

We've seen everything from prisons to palaces undergo transformations into high-flying hotels — and these are the ones that got it just right

PARAMOUNT HOUSE HOTEL, SYDNEY

OUR PANEL SAID: Right in the middle of the hip Surry Hills neighbourhood is a blockbuster of a renovation, housed in the former headquarters of Paramount Picture Studios. The 1940s-era brick building has been jazzed up with a copper-coloured herringbone-patterned facade and is appropriately cool for this part of town, with bare walls, high-end furniture and exposed brass plumbing. There's also a rooftop recreation centre, a killer Aussie-style breakfast and screenings at the Golden Age cinema next door. *paramounthousehotel.com*

Runners-up

COMO CASTELLO DEL NERO, TUSCANY
Guests can live like a king in this 12th-century castle converted into a country escape with 50 rooms, pristine gardens, two restaurants and fittingly regal decor in the rolling hills of Chianti. *comohotels.com*

THE JAFFA, TEL AVIV
In its newest incarnation as an elegant hotel, the former hospital and monastery in the ancient port of Jaffa has kept many of its original features, such as high vaulted ceilings and stained glass — this time shot through with a dash of contemporary style. *thejaffahotel.com*

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Brisbane offers a vibrant city centre, subtropical climate and abundant natural beauty. Get up close and personal with Australia's wildlife on a koala and river cruise, then take a bike ride through the City Botanic Gardens, or stroll around Brisbane's art galleries. Once evening comes, tuck into fine Queensland cuisine at one of the city's many restaurants while looking out over the twinkling lights of Story Bridge.

IMAGE: GETTY

HERVEY BAY
Head to this coastal city to swim, snorkel, scuba dive, sail and fish year-round and, from July to November, keep your eyes peeled for humpback whales. Back on dry land, explore the markets of Hervey Bay Esplanade or dine in one of the many restaurants lining the street.

FRASER ISLAND
The world's largest sand island has lakes, rock pools and wildlife galore. Head north in a 4x4 along Seventy-Five Mile Beach, view Maheno Shipwreck, walk through the subtropical rainforest and relax on the white-sand beaches of Lake McKenzie. Then, wander the technicolour sand cliffs of The Pinnacles for views from Indian Head.

HINTERLAND
Queensland's hinterland is home to mountain villages and quaint markets. Check out Glass House Mountains National Park's 11 volcanic peaks rising from the landscape — key features of indigenous legend. Take a drive through the national park or walk along one of its many trails.

NOOSA
This relaxed town offers beaches, tropical forest and the rugged Noosa Heads. Shop at the markets, relax in a day spa and watch the sun set over the river. Discover the tranquil, mirrored waterways of the Noosa Everglades, and cruise through the lakes and wetlands of one of Australia's best-kept secrets.

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What makes València Unique?

There are **countless reasons** that make València unique and tons of reasons why you should pack your bags and come on over.

Can you imagine a cosmopolitan city on a Mediterranean beach, beaming with fascinating history and culture, yet surrounded by futuristic architecture and modern arts? Now, add **300 days of sunshine,** 15 kms of sandy beaches, 4 starred Michelin restaurants and great hotel facilities. It is easy to understand why València is a **must-see destination.**

València is perfect for those wanting to combine a beach and city holiday, **just 2.5hrs from many UK airports** including Heathrow since March.

A stroll through the city's historic centre allows you to discover **magnificent buildings** including the Gothic Lonja, the Cathedral, the vibrant Central Market, where Mediterranean fruit and vegetables, countless rows of Serrano hams are stacked in eye-catching displays or the Colon Market, situated in the elegant Ensanche neighbourhood, is home to a **fine selection of food** stalls, cafés, restaurants and shops.

The Marina of Valencia, the former port has become a public space of 1 million m² open to both innovation and **leisure activities** is a perfect place to unwind and view the spectacular sunset.

Cycling is one of the most convenient ways to see the city and its **numerous museums** and street arts. Venture through the old Turia River's three miles of beautiful gardens overlooking the iconic City of Arts & Sciences buildings.

Each year València hosts numerous international events, such as the Valencia Marathon or the Moto GP, and its **vibrant festivals** such Las Fallas in March (declared a World Intangible Cultural Heritage Site by UNESCO) attracting millions of tourists from all over the world.

ADVERTISEMENT

See & Do in September/Oct 2019

01

València Cuina Oberta

From 17th - 27 October
It's a delightful event were top restaurants in the city offer gourmet tasting menus at great prices. A unique opportunity to experience fine dining at an excellent price.
For more information go to
www.visitvalencia.com

02

World Paella Day

20th September
For one day València, the birthplace of paella will share its most international dish with the rest of the world, revealing a recipe that combines tradition, culture and culinary excellence. Featuring large Paellas at City Hall Square as well as special menus at local restaurants.

03

Jean Dubuffet at IVAM Museum

8 October 2019/ 2 February 2020
A retrospective with more than 100 pieces by one of the most iconic artists of the latter half of the 20th century. From a historical-cultural and anthropological perspective, it portrays a moment of deep crisis after the Second World War.
www.ivam.es

04

Valencian Regional Festival

From the 1st – 9th of October
Valencians celebrate with parades and fireworks the Regional festival. A historical celebration dating back to 1238 in which King James I officially entered the city of València. It is also possible to enjoy regional dances and music during the celebrations.

TRAVEL GEEKS

ASK THE EXPERTS

NEED ADVICE FOR YOUR NEXT TRIP? ARE YOU AFTER RECOMMENDATIONS, TIPS AND GUIDANCE? THE TRAVEL GEEKS HAVE THE ANSWERS...

Q // I've got a trip to Sri Lanka coming up, but am nervous in case the FCO deems it unsafe again. What's the current situation?

The overall feeling on the ground is one of positivity as Sri Lanka starts to return to normality. Security measures have been heightened throughout the country, including increased checkpoints around major entry points and key locations, and the country's security services were able to quickly track down everyone connected with the attacks. Since then, Resplendent Ceylon and a group of like-minded local hoteliers set up the Sri Lanka Tourism Alliance, which, through *lovesrilanka.org*, is sharing real-time, honest updates from the ground in the form of blog posts, newsletters and video content. Travellers who are feeling nervous about visiting should head to the website for expert advice from more than 150 organisations, and to follow the journey of travellers currently in the country.

Tourist attractions are open for business and a roster of cultural and sporting events are still very much underway, including the colourful Kandy Esala Perahera — Sri Lanka's grandest Buddhist festival — taking place this August, and the World Surf League 3000 QS event in Arugam Bay later this year. Bookings are already on the up as travel advisories are relaxed, but as with all destinations following a terror attack, the advice to tourists and locals continues to suggest they remain vigilant.
respelendentceylon.com
MALIK FERNANDO

ABOVE: Leopard, Yala National Park, Sri Lanka
RIGHT: Wild camping, Wales

IMAGES: GETTY; PHOEBE-SMITH.COM

Q // I'd like to organise a wild camping trip in the UK, but I'm not sure about the rules. Can you camp anywhere you want and do you have to pay?

Wild camping is just that: wild. There are no designated pitches, no shower blocks or toilets, and that means there's also no fee to pay. However, it's not technically allowed everywhere in the UK.

In Scotland, owing to a wonderful Land Reform Act (2003), you can wild camp (respectfully) pretty much anywhere (barring the shores around Loch Lomond). In England, an ancient bylaw means that much of Dartmoor National Park in the southwest also allows wild camping. Throughout the rest of the country and all of Wales, however, you're technically supposed to ask for the landowners permission first. This is impractical and sometimes even impossible, but in many places, wild camping is tolerated as long as you follow the unwritten rules. The first is to arrive late and leave early to respect the environment — wait until it's going dark (though finding a suitable spot in daylight is advised). The second rule is to camp away from houses and pathways — only stay for one night in the same spot. The third is go to the toilet responsibly (dig a hole well away from any water sources) and take tissue away with you. The fourth is don't light a fire unless you know it's allowed. And, finally, take all rubbish away with you.

Really, all you need is a tent, sleeping bag, stove, plenty of food and, of course, your sense of adventure. *dartmoor.gov.uk*
phoebe-smith.com
PHOEBE SMITH

Q // Where would you recommend renting a Spanish villa to suit myself and my partner as well as our two primary school kids and their grandparents?

In mainland Spain, Puerto Banús is an ideal location for a seaside holiday. It has an excellent selection of shops and restaurants, while beach bars and the stunning marina are framed by an impressive mountain backdrop.

I'd suggest Rodeo Alto (from £5,087 per week), located on the outskirts of Puerto Banús town. Surrounded by a Balinese-style garden and protected by an impressive variety of palm trees, guests (up to eight) at the property can enjoy the relaxing and quiet atmosphere, while also taking advantage of being within walking distance of the local amenities and activities.

The property has a separate annexe nestled within its gardens making it ideal for a multigenerational family holiday and perfect for grandparents who wish to enjoy the benefits of a family holiday while maintaining their own privacy.

If splashing around in the pool and strolling through the marina doesn't quench your thirst for activity, the area offers other options; with watersports, hiking, a tennis club just 50 metres from the property and horse-riding and golf a short car journey away, you certainly won't be short of entertainment. *cvvillas.com*
GABRIELLA IBBA

Q // What's the best and safest way to carry my vape when flying? And is vaping allowed in airports?

Airlines now have very clear policies in place regarding vaping. A vaporiser can be taken on an aircraft, but as with cigarettes, passengers are forbidden from smoking them in the cabin.

Personal vaporisers and electronic nicotine delivery systems mostly contain a rechargeable lithium ion battery. The key thing to remember is that a vaporiser must be carried on your person, or in hand baggage during the flight, and shouldn't be packed into baggage that's checked into the hold.

To avoid the risk of overheating, vapes and/or their batteries should not be recharged during the flight. Spare lithium batteries must be individually protected so as to prevent short circuits by keeping them in their original packaging, by taping over exposed terminals or by placing each battery in a separate plastic bag to prevent the terminals touching a metallic object.

Always check with your airline in advance if you're in any doubt about whether a certain item is allowed on board an aircraft.

Vaping is generally permitted in designated areas of airports, although many are now completely smoke-free. It's best to check with airport staff before vaping. *caa.co.uk* **ANITA ROSSER**

THE EXPERTS

PHOEBE SMITH // AUTHOR OF WILDERNESS WEEKENDS

MALIK FERNANDO // RESPLENDENT CEYLON/SRI LANKA TOURISM ALLIANCE

ANITA ROSSER // CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY

GABRIELLA IBBA // CV VILLAS

THE INFO

CRAFT BEER AROUND THE WORLD

THE WORLD'S LARGEST BEER FESTIVAL, OKTOBERFEST, KICKS OFF THIS MONTH IN MUNICH. HERE'S EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW TO PASS AS A BEER AFICIONADO. WORDS: LIZ DODD

CRAFT BEER

IS MADE BY A BREWERY THAT'S SMALL (IN TERMS OF OUTPUT), **INDEPENDENT** AND USES **TRADITIONAL BREWING METHODS**

IN NUMBERS

9,500
The number of breweries in Europe

3/4
The proportion that are microbreweries and SMEs

39.7bn
Litres of beer produced in Europe in 2017

2019 CRAFT BEER TRENDS

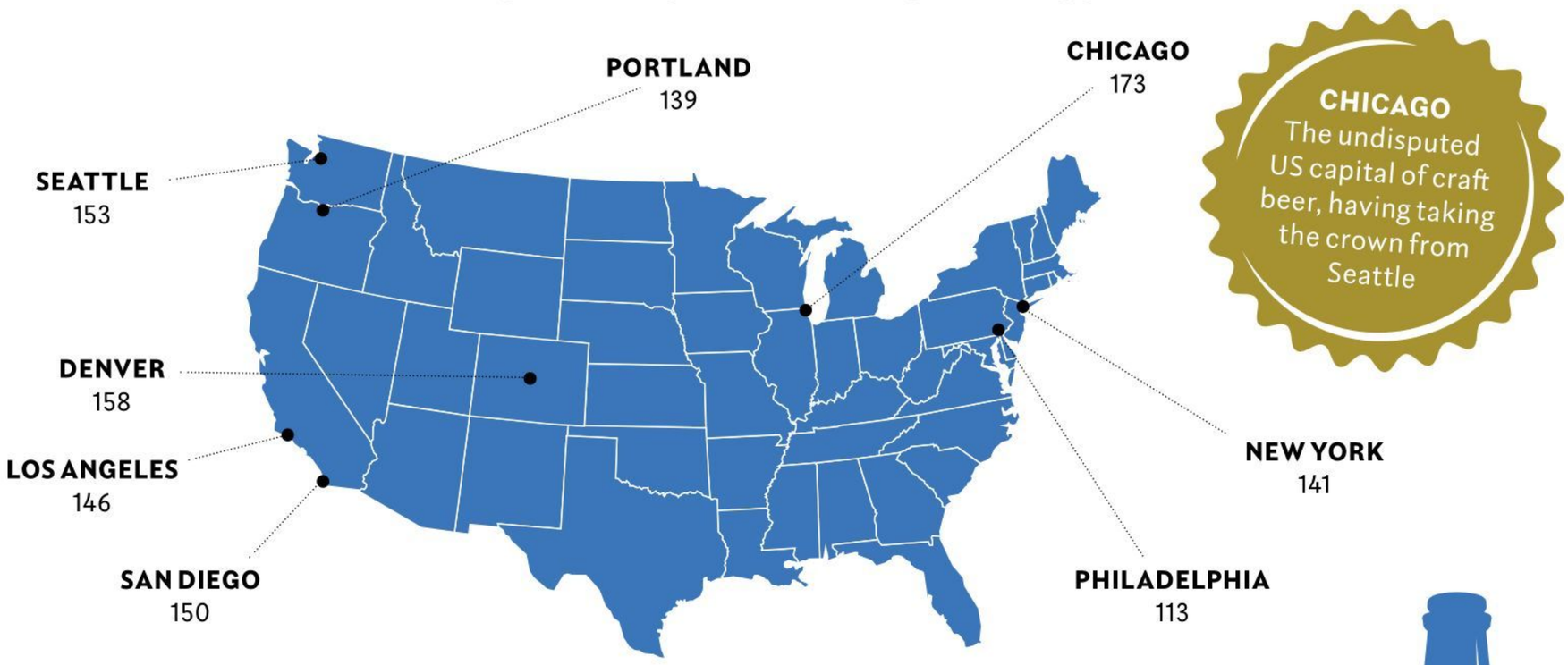
WEIRD BEERS

The Wild Beer Co's Of The Sea, brewed with lobsters, cockles, seaweed, sea salt and sea herbs

Pressure Drop Nanban Kanpai IPA with zuzu, orange and grapefruit

Rogue Sriracha Hot Stout Beer, a stout made with sriracha hot sauce

ON THE RISE: BREWERIES IN THE US



CHICAGO
The undisputed US capital of craft beer, having taking the crown from Seattle

Opened in 2018, Brewdog's DogHouse, in Columbus, Ohio, was the world's first craft beer hotel

32
beer-themed rooms

6,000
sq ft craft beer museum

IN NORSE SOCIETY, ONLY WOMEN WERE ALLOWED TO BREW BEER, AND ALL THE EQUIPMENT NEEDED TO PRODUCE IT WAS THEIR PROPERTY, ACCORDING TO VIKING LAW

Hill Farmstead Brewery in Vermont, US, is the best on the planet, according to RateBeer, the world's largest beer review and rating website

IMAGES: GETTY; SOURCES: BREWERS ASSOCIATION; BREWERS OF EUROPE 2018 REPORT; RATEBEER; BREWERS ASSOCIATION NEW ZEALAND; DEA LATIS; BEVERAGEDAILY.COM; TELEGRAPH.CO.UK

HOT TOPIC

SHOULD VENICE BAN CRUISE SHIPS?

THE CRUISE SHIP CRASH OF JUNE 2019 HAS NOW THRUST THE ISSUE OF OVERTOURISM IN VENICE INTO THE GLOBAL SPOTLIGHT. WHAT CAN BE DONE TO SAVE VENICE FROM THE PROBLEM? WORDS: JAMES DRAVEN

How is cruise tourism adversely affecting Venice?
Venice's courtyards and canals are always thronged by tourists, but never more so than when a cruise ship docks. But cruise tourism's impact isn't just aesthetic; conservationists insist the fragile lagoon ecosystem is being damaged, and that waves created by the ships are eroding the foundations of a city that's already sinking.

The city's mayor, Luigi Brugnaro, has even urged UNESCO to place Venice on its 'blacklist' of endangered World Heritage Sites, claiming he doesn't believe the Italian government is doing enough to protect it from overtourism.

Has this always been a problem?
Justin Francis, CEO of ethical tour company Responsible Travel, says, "Cruise ship tourism in Venice has increased by 439% in the past 15 years, catapulting the city to the cruise capital of Europe." Andy Harmer, UK & Ireland director for Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), is keen to put that figure into perspective: "The cruise industry represents just 5% of Venice's tourism, and visits are scheduled over a year in advance to allow for preparation by our destination partners."

With Venice's resident population dropping from a peak of 164,000 in 1931 to just 50,000 today — a number dwarfed by the 30 million tourists that visit each year — many are concerned that tourism is threatening the city's cultural heritage.

Isn't Venice benefitting from the tourist boom?
Many people insist it's vital for the local economy. CLIA's Harmer points out, "The cruise industry brings more than €150m [£134.5m] to the Venetian economy annually." CLIA figures show that, on average, cruise passengers each spend more than €200 (£180) in Venice. But Justin Francis argues the numbers aren't accurate. Furthermore, he shares the view of many conservationists that cruises contribute little to the local economy. "They sleep on the ship, and return to the ship for lunch and dinner because it's in their all-inclusive package," says Francis.

How can locals and tourists coexist in Venice?
"What Venice needs is an effective housing policy and a ban on cruise ships," says Francis, although CLIA's Harmer insists that Venice is a crucial hub for cruising the wider region. "Adriatic ports, including Ancona, Bari Brindisi, Split, Dubrovnik, and Trieste couldn't be reached without Venice," he says.

The government plans to divert larger cruise ships from Venice to the nearby town of Marghera. In the meantime, Mayor Brugnaro wants to open the Vittorio Emanuele canal as an alternative to the historic Giudecca canal. It's a plan Harmer says CLIA supports, but adds, "[we] need a definitive decision by the Italian authorities on the future of cruising in Venice so that they can deliver a sustainable solution that's good for our passengers and the residents."

WHERE ELSE HAS BEEN AFFECTED BY CRUISE TOURISM?

DUBROVNIK
It's a stunner of a city, but the fact that Dubrovnik doubled as King's Landing in hit TV show, *Game of Thrones*, helped flood the streets with cruise visitors and day-trippers, with the city receiving 742,000 passengers on 538 cruise ships in 2017. In 2016, UNESCO threatened to revoke Dubrovnik's World Heritage Site status unless it curbed tourist numbers. The city responded with a series of caps, including a limit on the number of cruise ships arriving each day.

MAJORCA
Last year saw locals protesting the daily arrival of up to 17,000 summer cruise visitors. Campaigners say overtourism is harming the environment, clogging the roads, driving locals out and destroying the island's social fabric.

BARCELONA
Home to the largest port in the Med, it's no surprise this tourist hotspot is overrun with cruise passengers, with 2.7 million arriving in 2016. Manel Casals, director general of the Barcelona Hotel Association, said: "Of the 32 million people who visited Barcelona last year, 23 million were day-trippers who spend very little money in the city."

AND ANOTHER THING... NEW EUROPEAN RAIL LINKS

ATHENS TO THESSALONIKI
A high-speed train that connects the two Greek cities in under four hours — with stops in Larissa and Paleofarsalos — launched in May to make rail travel around Greece more accessible. *rail.cc*

PLOVDIV TO EDIRNE
A new train service connecting Bulgaria's Plovdiv to Turkey's Edirne began this June. The route takes about four hours and runs once daily on Saturdays and Sundays. *railturkey.org*

KOŠICE TO MUKACHEVO
Also in June, the first rail route was unveiled to directly connect Slovakia and Ukraine. The route takes under four hours and runs daily between the two cities. *slovakrail.sk*

MORA TO GALLIVARE
The new Swedish railway, launched in June, links Mora and Gallivare, two isolated settlements in Lapland, with multiple stops en route designed to boost tourism activities. *inlandsbanan.se*

IMAGE: ALAMY

Kit list CITY CYCLING

WE ROUND UP SOME OF THE BEST LIGHTWEIGHT, COMPACT BIKE KIT TO HELP MAKE NAVIGATING THE CITY STREETS A BREEZE

1 VAN RYSEL RR 900 CF CARBON ROAD BIKE
This stylish road bike has a full-carbon Ultra Evo Dynamic frame and fork module that Decathlon says offers the perfect balance between lightness, performance and dynamism. RRP: £1,399.99. *decathlon.co.uk*

2 SPURCYCLE BELL
The manufacturer of this bike bell claims its ring lasts three times longer than other bells. Finished with a diamond-like carbon coating, one of its main selling points is its sleek, compact design. Comes with a lifetime guarantee, too. RRP: £49.99. *alwaysriding.co.uk*

3 GRENFELL CAPE
British clothing brand Grenfell designed this cape with cycling in mind. Accordingly, it's got a waterproof outer, reinforced hood to battle wind and is finished with a merino wool lining, making it perfect for bad-weather commutes. RRP: £695. *grenfell.com*

6 SMARTHALO
When connected to a phone, this gadget acts intuitively to engage a range of tools, including a navigation system, fitness tracker, weather checker, anti-theft alarm and a front light that turns on by itself when it gets dark. RRP: £129. *smarthalo.bike*

4 EXPOSURE TRACE/TRACER LIGHTS
Lightweight without compromising on brightness, these lights can be charged within two hours via USB and have a fuel gauge that displays how much battery you have left. RRP: £75. *exposurelights.com*

5 JACK WOLFSKIN ILLUMINATION PROTON 18-LITRE PACK
Roomy but lightweight, this rucksack comes with an integrated red light strip, making it ideal for night rides — just connect a power bank and go. RRP: £130. *jack-wolfskin.com*

Three to try: Foldable helmets

CLOSCA
Elegant and squashing down to the size of a book, the Closca helmet incorporates ventilation and a visor. RRP: £108. *closca.com*
Rating: 7/10

MORPHER
Comfortable to wear, the Morpher folds into a flat package in one swift motion. RRP: £109.99. *morpherhelmet.com*
Rating: 7/10

PLIXI FIT
The solidly built Plixi Fit folds into three, making it easy to fit into a bag for commuting RRP: £89. *overade.com*
Rating: 8/10

Tech traveller

TECHNOLOGY REPORTER FOR @BBCCLICK AND AUTHOR OF *WORKING THE CLOUD*, KATE RUSSELL PICKS THE LATEST INNOVATIONS

VIRTUALLY READY

FROM LEARNING A LANGUAGE TO SKI COACHING, THERE ARE PLENTY OF VIRTUAL ONLINE COURSES AND APPS THAT WILL GET YOU 'TRAVEL READY'

If you want to be able to talk about more than eating and drinking, check out the 'course wizard' feature in Lingvist (iOS/Android). The app uses flash cards and voice recognition to build up your vocabulary in French, Russian, German or Spanish. It also uses machine learning to respond to your learning style, and in the course wizard you can add vocabulary relating to certain topics. So, if you're going sailing in France add that to the wizard and you'll be learning terms like '*grand-voile*' and '*vaisseau abandonné*'. There's a seven-day free trial then a choice of subscription options up to £16.99pcm.

For winter sports lovers getting into gear for the season, there's a number of high-tech ski instructor apps — such as SnowCookie (RRP: £280) — that monitor your movements on the mountain to measure your position, speed and stamina. But how about getting yourself up to speed before you leave? Beginners should try iSkiandRide a user-friendly, visually-led learn-to-ski app, with animated tuition points, and audio coaching cues (RRP: £1.99).

My last pick for virtual preparation is *scamstravel.com*. It's not nice to think about getting scammed when travelling, but forewarned is forearmed. This website uses the power of the crowd (that's you and me by the way) to report and share instances of scams. Browsing through the location you're headed to could save you anything from paying too much for a train ticket to the more serious scams we sometimes hear about.

TOP TIPS FOR... *investing in crowdfunders*

Crowdfunding has helped some truly innovative products come to market when no financial institution would take the risk. It allows consumers to decide what's worth investing in and it's great for travel — a lot of my gadget picks come from trawling the listings on *Kickstarter* and *Indiegogo*. Tips to follow:

CHECK FOR UPDATES: If the creator isn't active with posting new information regularly, you can expect a similar attitude towards finishing the product — remember, this is still a speculative investment.

BEWARE THE 'FLEXIBLE' CAMPAIGN: Some crowdfunding websites run campaigns that keep your money even if the funding goal isn't met. Back 'all-or-nothing, rewards-based' campaigns to avoid this.

SHOUT ABOUT IT: If you pledge to support a campaign and want to see it succeed, it's partly your job to help promote it. Crowdfunders are so-named because they rely on the power of social media to get the word out.

GET THE GADGET

Roku Streaming Stick+

No more scrolling through endless channels on the hotel TV looking for something to watch or resting your laptop on your belly while you try to watch a film in bed. The Roku streaming stick plugs into the TV's HMDI slot, then connects to the hotel's local wi-fi network through the app on your phone. They call the feature 'Hotel to Dorm', and it lets you stream 4K HDR video from all of the major entertainment platforms and many more. It even has a remote control so you can plug your phone in to recharge on the dresser and lie back to enjoy your chosen TV content on the big screen. £59.99. *roku.com*

@katerussell
katerussell.co.uk

IMAGE: GETTY

FREQUENT FLYER

HELPING HAND

FEW OF US RELISH THE AIRPORT AND IN-FLIGHT EXPERIENCE, BUT FOR TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES, IT CAN BE CONSIDERABLY MORE DAUNTING. THAT'S WHERE SPECIAL ASSISTANCE COMES IN — BUT WHAT SHOULD THOSE USING THE SERVICE IN THE EU FOR THE FIRST TIME EXPECT? WORDS: DAVID WHITLEY

What is special assistance?

Essentially, it's about getting anyone who needs help through the airport, onto the plane, and safely through the airport at the other end. By law, all airlines and airports in the EU have to offer this service free of charge. In practice, many airlines and airports around the globe will too. The problem is that what this entails often differs from airline to airline and airport to airport.

Who's eligible?

In the EU, there are no set rules — the principle being that any passenger with a disability or reduced mobility who feels in need of help shouldn't be obliged to pass a qualification threshold to get it. It's not just for those who usually use a wheelchair, or have a Blue Badge. If you've an injury or illness that, for example, makes it difficult to stand for a long time in a queue or walk, you can request special assistance. But you do have to request it — and preferably at least 48 hours in advance.

How do you request it?

Some standardisation really wouldn't go amiss here, but alas, it's slightly different with every airline. For many, it can be done online during the booking process — British Airways, for example, offers three options based on the level of assistance required. Otherwise, it needs to be done over the phone. And, it's worth double checking by phone 48 hours beforehand.

What happens when I get to the airport?

On arrival (either in the car park, drop-off bay or train station), there should be a prominently positioned button, allowing you to call for assistance, which should arrive promptly. Depending on what level you booked, someone will be available to take you through check-in and security, to the aircraft door (or seat, if needed) with a wheelchair or buggy. The same applies at the other end.

If travelling with your own wheelchair, most of the time, you'll be able to stay in it until the aircraft door, where it'll be taken away and stored in the hold, then brought back to the door at the end of the flight. In other airports, you'll have to check the chair in, then be taken through the airport in an airport chair. Special conditions apply for battery-operated chairs, which airline websites usually spell out.

And in-flight?

Some airlines — again, such as British Airways — offer in-flight chairs for moving around and going to the toilet. Crew will also generally assist with stowing hand luggage. Special assistance passengers are usually first to board and last to get off.

Don't expect privileges on seat choice, though. In practice, special assistance passengers are usually placed close to an emergency exit, although not in an emergency exit row. But there's no law saying special assistance passengers have to be reserved more spacious seats near the front. Again, it varies by airline, so ask for specifics when booking.

For information on rights: caa.co.uk

GOING IT ALONE

Special assistance extends to certain help on board the plane, but for the safety of other passengers, crew can't aid in all instances. Most airlines will insist you must be travelling with an assistant if you need help with the following:

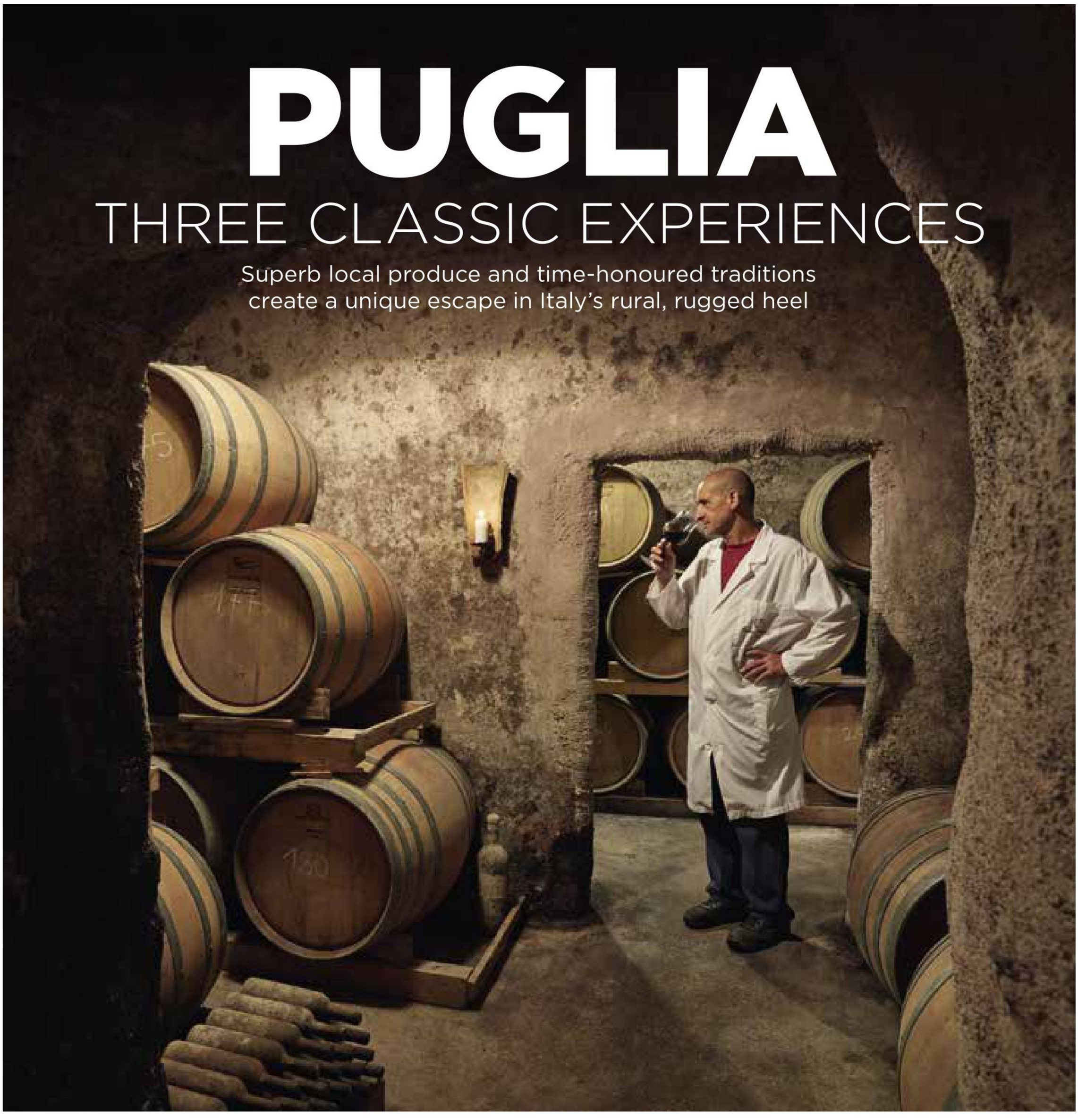
MOVING AROUND: This includes getting in and out of your seat (including into the wheelchair provided to get you to the toilet)
SAFETY: Unfastening your seatbelt and reaching an emergency exit on your own
COMMUNICATING: Understanding safety procedures from the crew
EMERGENCIES: Reaching for and fitting a life jacket
OXYGEN MASKS: Finding and applying masks in case of a loss of pressure
PERSONAL CARE: For example, taking medication and eating
ASSISTANCE DOGS: Attending to the needs of any special canine companions, which will be allowed on board by prior arrangement

IMAGE: GETTY

PUGLIA

THREE CLASSIC EXPERIENCES

Superb local produce and time-honoured traditions create a unique escape in Italy's rural, rugged heel



1 Underground oil mills

These subterranean mills were once the core of Puglia's olive oil trade. Carved into soft subterranean stone, the mills passed, pressed and processed this liquid gold before it was exported all over Europe for use in lamps. Tours now run in the disused mills, offering a fascinating insight into this traditional industry.

2 Local cuisine

Puglia is dotted with mansions, churches and courtyard houses. In a *masseria* farmhouse, food is a highlight thanks to fresh local produce such as olives, mozzarella and shellfish. Dishes in timeworn *trattorie* (taverns) are unfussy but big on taste, serving dishes like *orecchiette* (local ear-shaped pasta) — just leave room for delicious gelato.

3 Primitivo di Manduria DOC

Produced across the Taranto area, this deep, intense red is a must when visiting the region. A visit to a historic Apulian wine cellar is an excellent way to sample them — especially when paired with classic antipasti. Visit during the September grape harvest for a closer look at wine-making.

Essentials

Getting there: Ryanair flies direct to Bari and Brindisi from Stansted, Edinburgh, Bristol and Manchester. Other airlines, including Alitalia, Lufthansa and EasyJet, also fly to Bari and Brindisi, with connections in Europe.

#WEAREINPUGLIA

To find out more, visit *weareinpuglia.it*

EXPLORE FUND THE NORTH FACE

The North Face is helping young people to have better access to life-changing experiences in the outdoors

Following a successful campaign last year for the brand's She Moves Mountains campaign — aimed at empowering women and girls to explore the outdoors — The North Face and The Outward Bound Trust are continuing to work together in providing opportunities for young people to immerse themselves in outdoor activities.

Getting out

The project enables children from different backgrounds to experience nature through school trips and events, learning skills like kayaking, hiking and orienteering. It also includes training instructors from diverse backgrounds, as well as exploring the barriers various demographic groups face in accessing the outdoors.

Coming together

The North Face Explore Fund fosters a sense of community, better connect people to the benefits of outdoor exploration and empower individuals to be environmental stewards. It creates access to, and drives equity in, the outdoors by funding hundreds of nonprofit organisations based on two themes: Enabling Exploration and Loving Wild Places.

Going forward

Since it began in 2010, The North Face Explore Fund has contributed millions in grants to nonprofits. After a successful rollout in the US, it's currently creating communities and protecting wild places in its expansion across Europe.

Through a series of activities and events throughout the year, thousands of young people will be enabled to experience exploration in the UK

Essentials

To find out more about The Explore Fund, visit the website: ***thenorthface.co.uk*** **or follow The North Face online,** ***@thenorthfaceuk*** ***#neverstopexploring*** **on Instagram, and** ***@thenorthface*** **on Facebook.**

THE OUTWARD BOUND TRUST

THE NORTH FACE

For more information, visit *thenorthface.co.uk*

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

A vibrant arts scene, quirky counterculture and the love of a good time — when it comes to having fun, few cities can rival the German capital. In our next issue, we discover what makes Berlin the European epicentre of cool

Plus *// Baku, Bali, Chile, Detroit, Finland, Genoa, Havana, Krakow, Nova Scotia, Zanzibar*

OCTOBER ISSUE ON SALE 5 SEPTEMBER 2019

For more information on our subscription offers, ***see page 192***

IMAGE: AWL IMAGES

SLEEP, EAT, DIVE, REPEAT

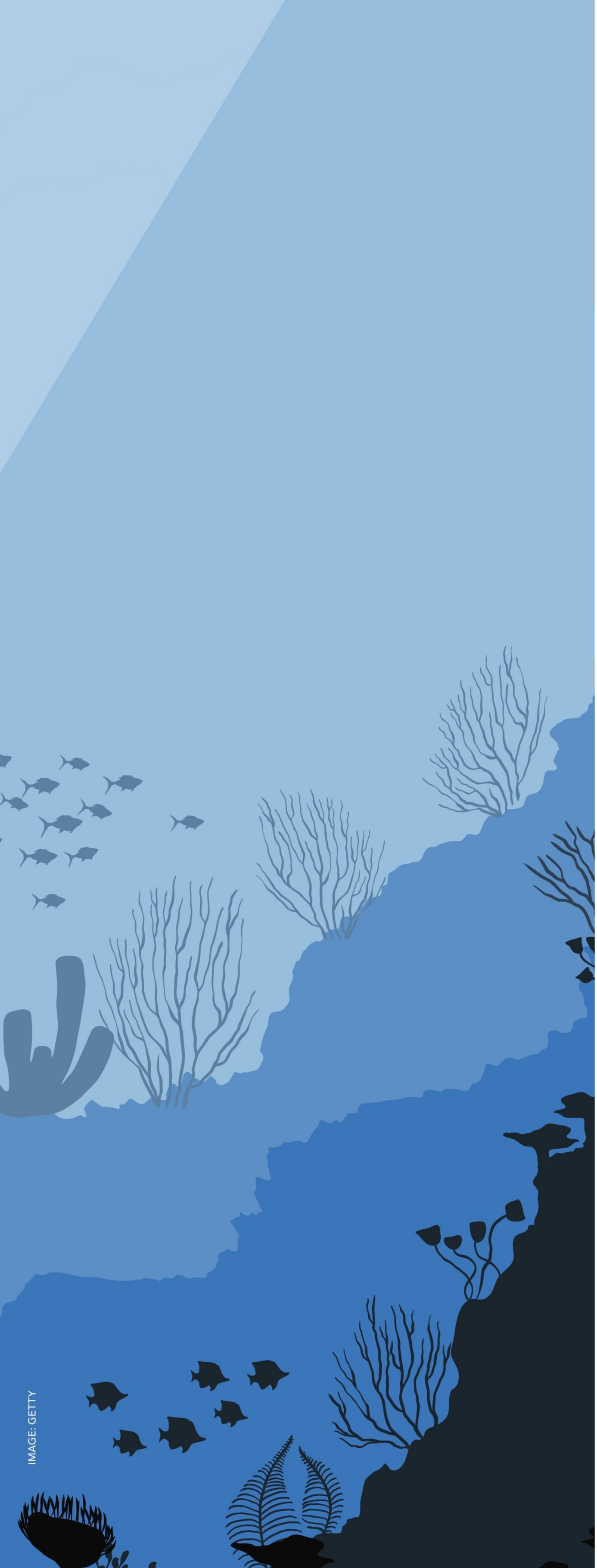


IMAGE: GETTY

IF YOU WANT TO DIVE THE WORLD'S MOST REMOTE AND PRISTINE SITES, AND GET THE MAXIMUM DIVING WITH MINIMUM EFFORT, YOU NEED TO DITCH THE RESORT FOR A LIVEABOARD. WE LOOK AT THE BEST BOATS — FROM BARGAIN TO LUXURY — UNCOVERING WHAT TO EXPECT ONBOARD, AND WHERE TO FIND OFFBEAT ITINERARIES. WORDS: SAM LEWIS

The 58-metre cruiser *SS Thorfinn* is gently bobbing in the mid-Pacific in Chuuk Lagoon, billed as the biggest diveable ship graveyard on the planet. On board, an audience of 20 listens avidly to a history lecture on Operation Hailstone, during the Second World War; part of a series of attacks that created the eerie underwater museum below them. Tomorrow, they'll dive from custom-designed 32ft tenders to explore some of the 250 aircraft and 40-odd ships, encrusted with colourful coral and full to the brim with cargo ranging from rusting motorcycles and munitions to unbroken sake cups and human remains.

But tonight, with a 1:1 crew-to-guest ratio, there's no need to do anything other than sip cocktails on the aft deck and tuck into a three-course meal before retiring to the comfort of air-conditioned cabins.

Thousands of miles away in Thailand, a group of divers tucks into rice and curry before piling into a cosy cabin with four bunk beds, ready to explore some of the region's most remote dive sites at first light. Their week's diving costs less than half the price of a week on the *SS Thorfinn* and while some creature comforts may be lacking, underwater there's no first- or second-class tickets: everyone has a front row seat.

"We often get the same clients booking a high-end liveaboard somewhere exotic and then a staple Red Sea trip in the same year," says Phil North, product manager at Dive Worldwide, who emphasises that the level of budget liveaboards has improved dramatically, with many even offering free nitrox and wi-fi.

"Just 15 years ago in the Red Sea, clients would be told how many showers they could have in a week, whereas now liveaboards have desalination systems on board and an endless supply of fresh water. The fresh fruit and veg would usually be well past its sell-by date come the last two days of the trip. Now there's so much space and the quality of meals — lobster, steak and rack of lamb — and the amount of food is consistently high."

At the luxury end, standards have also risen with some liveaboards offering king-size beds, spa therapists, wine cellars, private washer/driers and even helicopter pads, while the choice of vessel is also bigger than ever. Take your pick from a small gulet, modern cruiser, schooner, wooden phinisi (an Indonesian two- or three-masted sailing ship) or a spacious catamaran.

While onboard experiences and itineraries differ, all liveaboards have several things in common: they sail far from land and give guests the opportunity to enjoy multiple dives every day, waking up each morning close to a different remote pristine dive site.

"There's nothing quite like floating among jungle-clad islands and white sand beaches with not another soul

JETBOAT

INTERLAKEN

THE ONE AND ONLY JETBOAT IN THE ALPS

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www.jetboat.ch · +41 78 845 56 99

Dream destination // The seas around Cocos Island are home to huge schools of scalloped hammerheads, manta rays and even whales, making this a dive site on every keen diver's radar

in sight and world-class scenes below the surface," says Louisa Fisher who, as head of Original Diving, has experienced multiple liveaboards in Egypt, the Maldives and Indonesia. "Liveaboards are getting more and more popular in line with the travel trend that people really want to get away from it all, off-the-beaten track with no other boats or buildings in sight. Plus, there's the bonus of getting the maximum amount of diving — three to five dives a day — with minimum effort."

Getting serious

For serious divers, Sandro Lonardi, head of marketing at PADI, says liveaboards are the only way to explore some of the world's best dive sites: "Resort diving limits you to a specific location with dive sites typically within an hour's boat ride from the dive centre. Liveaboards, however, allow you to access areas you simply couldn't reach on a day trip from the coast."

Lonardi points to remote Cocos Island off the coast of Costa Rica on a map. "You won't find any hotels there," he says, adding that the 342-mile journey from the coast would take around 36 hours by boat. Described as the most beautiful island in the world by legendary oceanographer Jacques Cousteau, the seas around Cocos Island are home to huge schools of scalloped hammerheads, manta rays and even whales, making this a dive site on every keen diver's radar.

Once you've done Cocos, you'll probably be saving up for the ultimate dive safari — the Galápagos, for which liveaboards are ideal. Darwin and Wolfe, two uninhabited outlying islands in the archipelago, are home to hammerheads, rays, Galápagos sharks, whale sharks and mola molas, yet take around 12 hours to reach from the coast of Ecuador.

On a diver's bucket list, you're sure to come across the Socorro Islands. Around 250 miles southwest of the tip of Mexico's Baja Peninsula, they're famed for their unique ecosystem and the chance for close encounters with mantas and humpback whales.

Then there's the remote Tubbataha Reef in the Philippines. Located bang in the middle of the Sulu Sea, it's only accessible by boat during a couple of months of the year, and home to pristine dive sites with more than 300 coral species and 600 species of fish including thresher sharks, whale sharks, hawksbill and green turtles.

However, while liveaboards make many of these destinations accessible, Lonardi warns that diving in such remote places can be challenging.

"Most of these are quite hardcore and are not for novice divers due to rough seas and strong currents," he says.

Phillip Connor, MD of Sportif Dive, agrees. "You need to have experience on 75% to 85% of liveaboards as you're typically diving into deep water, which can throw novice divers. Beginners should stick to resort diving where you can begin and end a dive from the beach, with the ability to kneel down and stand up."

While many novice divers are tempted to gain experience on a Red Sea liveaboard, for example, due to its proximity and low prices (one week, including full board and diving, can cost around £1,000), Connor warns it's not as flat and calm as people think.

"The wind can cause issues in the Red Sea and it's not unusual for operators to demand a 50-dive minimum — meaning divers must have at least 50 dives under their belt. When you get to this level, you tend to understand drift and current."

For beginner divers, Connor recommends the Maldives or the Caribbean (the Caymans or Bahamas offer excellent diving), due to easier dive conditions.

"It's possible to get a week in the Maldives for £1,499 per person, including full board, all diving and flights. A trip like this will likely take in mantas and other big fish."

It's also easy to become more proficient with operators such as Emperor Divers offering advanced dive courses on a boat, with up to 20 dives in one week.

"Time on a liveaboard doesn't have to be nothing but diving," Lonardi adds. "These days, many vessels are kitted out with kayaks or SUPS. Some are more relaxed than others with the Scubaspa brand for example having an onboard team of full-time therapists offering a hybrid or a mixed package so you can trade dives for spa treatments."

More than diving

While most liveaboards offer four to seven-night itineraries, some in Australia's Great Barrier Reef offer two- or three-night trips for a taster experience. Longer trips (13-14 nights) often cater for those with a special interest with experts in photography or marine biology onboard and opportunities for guests to help survey and tag wildlife.

"Last summer I joined a voluntourism trip aboard the 134ft expedition vessel *M/Y Sharkwater* on a manta and turtle ID tagging research trip off the Pacific Coast of Costa Rica — one of the most fun liveaboards adventures I've done," says hobby diver Jeanette Grant, who's been on nine liveaboards since 2016.

For Grant, it's not just what's underneath the surface that makes the trip: "I've made some great friends on liveaboards. Living in such close proximity means you form stronger bonds with people than you would at a resort. Conversely, living in such close proximity can also make for a less than desirable

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dynamic if there's any conflict. It's all part of the experience though. One of my favourite aspects is spending time getting to know the crew. They're akin to the locals I enjoy meeting on land-based trips and so finding out about their culture, knowledge of the destinations and fun personalities is always a mind-opening, positive experience."

Like many divers, Grant has travelled alone on many of her trips.

"Around 90% of our clients are single," says Connor, who points out there's no single supplement for those willing to share a cabin. Singles are typically matched by age and gender and have one thing in common — a passion for diving and the underwater world.

"The range of clients is huge," says Connor. "Some can afford to dive several times a year, others have saved up all year for the one trip. We get every profession under the sun: teachers, doctors, plumbers, truck drivers. It's a diverse sport. And while we don't get many 18-25s, unless it's a dive club, we do get those in their 80s."

While single travellers can snap up some great last-minute deals as operators vie to fill cabins, it's essential to book in advance if you want to secure a place on a liveaboard sailing to a bucket-list destination such as Tubbataha Reef in the Philippines or the wrecks of Truk Lagoon, with cabins often booked up two years in advance to the Galápagos despite the eye watering cost of £5,000-£7,000 per week.

And, for those who have ticked off these top sites, new areas are emerging. For example, divers who have explored Indonesia's Komodo and Raja Ampat needn't stop there — itineraries in the Banda Sea, the Forgotten Islands and Alor are gaining in popularity, according to Original Diving, while Socorro, Palau and the Azores have recently become more accessible thanks to more good-quality liveaboard operators. Other on-trend itineraries include destinations — like Sudan and Papua New Guinea — where unrest and FCO advice makes a typical resort-based holiday impossible.

Meanwhile, TV programmes such as *Blue Planet* are increasing the demand for ocean safari 'experiences', similar to the wildebeest migration through East Africa, although timing is, of course, key.

Take the big spawning seasons in Palau, Micronesia, for example. This natural event occurs during a full and new moon when huge numbers of red snapper rise up from the deep to gather and begin mating manoeuvres, which in turn attract large predators including bull sharks and hammerheads. During the new moon, hundreds of humphead parrotfish gather and bump heads to gain superiority over females, changing colour as the fish prepare to spawn, again attracting predators — and divers who are keen to get up close to the action.

But it's not all about tropical waters. *MS Sula* tours Svalbard from the middle of October to the middle of February to see the largest gathering of orcas in the world, congregating due to the vast amounts of herring in the waters. The downside? Dry suit diving will be essential, but look on the bright side — there will be plenty of ice breakers to get to know fellow passengers.

TOP TIPS FROM DIVE WORLDWIDE

PLAN AHEAD: Some liveaboards request a minimum number of dives and experience, so be sure to check well in advance before booking. Ensure your insurance also covers you for the type of diving you're planning to do.

BE PUNCTUAL: It's always a good idea to arrive one day before the liveaboard departs in case of delayed flights or lost luggage. Ensure you're present for the safety briefing, too, as this is crucial.

KIT UP: Make sure your equipment has been serviced before going on holiday. Take a dry bag for your valuables on the dive deck. Wi-fi may be chargeable on boats to remote locations, with charging points usually available on main deck.

STAY VISIBLE: Most liveaboards provide divers with safety devices, but check prior to travel. It's important to bring these devices on dives in the event you're not diving with the group, get separated from the group or end up in a strong drift. A good bet are surface marker buoys, which float above you; attachments for a low pressure inflator that make a loud noise; or even a personal locator beacon.

TAKE A BREATH: Nitrox is free on some liveaboards but chargeable on others. Some boats can provide gas for rebreathers and many liveaboards can be chartered for more advanced, technical diving (ask ahead).

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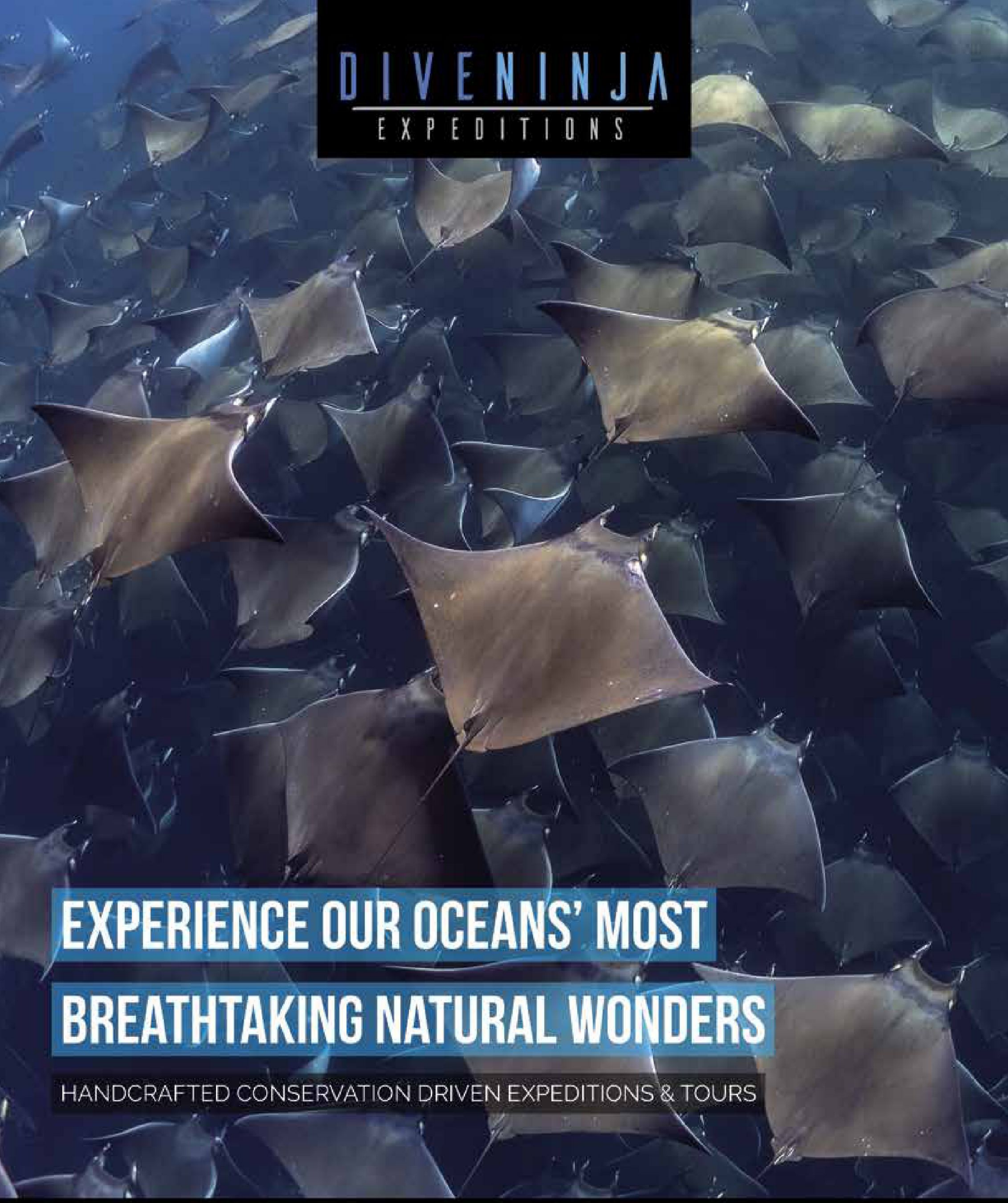

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at Gujarat, India.

India is a country of ethnic culture, traditions and a vibrant new generation. A wide spectrum of cultural diversity thrives throughout the country from north to south and east to west. Gujarat is a glorious example of India's tradition of honouring its heritage, where people from all cultures, celebrate their diversity. Among the many culturally diverse festivals of Gujarat, the most eagerly awaited and universally acclaimed is the Festival of Dance, Navratri, meaning a celebration of nine days.

Worship and revelry go hand in hand and the gusto of the celebrations makes it a spellbinding spectacle found nowhere else. On the devotional side, nine manifestations of the goddess Amba are worshipped each of the nine nights of Navratri.

Navratri is one of the world's longest and most participatory dance festivals. Age, religion, gender and dancing skills are no bar for anyone to be part of the celebration. The premier dance of Navratri, the Garba, is performed around the garbo (a lit clay lantern). This lantern represents life, and the foetus in the womb. Dancing around this garbo is symbolic of celebrating the feminine form of divinity.

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It's not just a Dance Festival

There is perhaps no better time to visit and catch the pulse of Gujarat's throbbing cultural vibrancy than during Navratri. Over the nine nights people pour out into the open in their traditional dress and dance at street corners, fairgrounds, residential localities, clubs and colleges. Everyone is welcome to dance to the melodious Gujarati folk songs and indulge in the fine food of Gujarat, including the delicacies like jalebi, fafda and other traditional savouries. The energy during these nine nights is charmingly infectious. The excitement, music, dance, food, temple visits and the rich culture and vibrancy of the ancient Indian traditions unfurl over the nine days in an unforgettable festival.

When in Gujarat, dress as the GARBA LOVERS DO!

Dressing up for the occasion is surely the focus of the festival. Men and women turn out in their traditional outfits embellished with tiny mirrors, silk thread work, intricate embroidery, sequins and crystals. These attires are paired with traditional silver jewellery for women and with turbans for the men. The young and old put on their best ensemble and dance to their heart's content. The nine nights out in the open, with its magical ambience and vibrancy, can be a cherished memory of a lifetime for anyone, especially for visitors. Joyful expressions of deep devotion and contentment set the tone from the start to the finish. The feeling of fulfilment energises you for the rest of the year.

Everyone is invited to join us for Navratri, which will surely be the longest and the most unforgettable festival you have ever attended.

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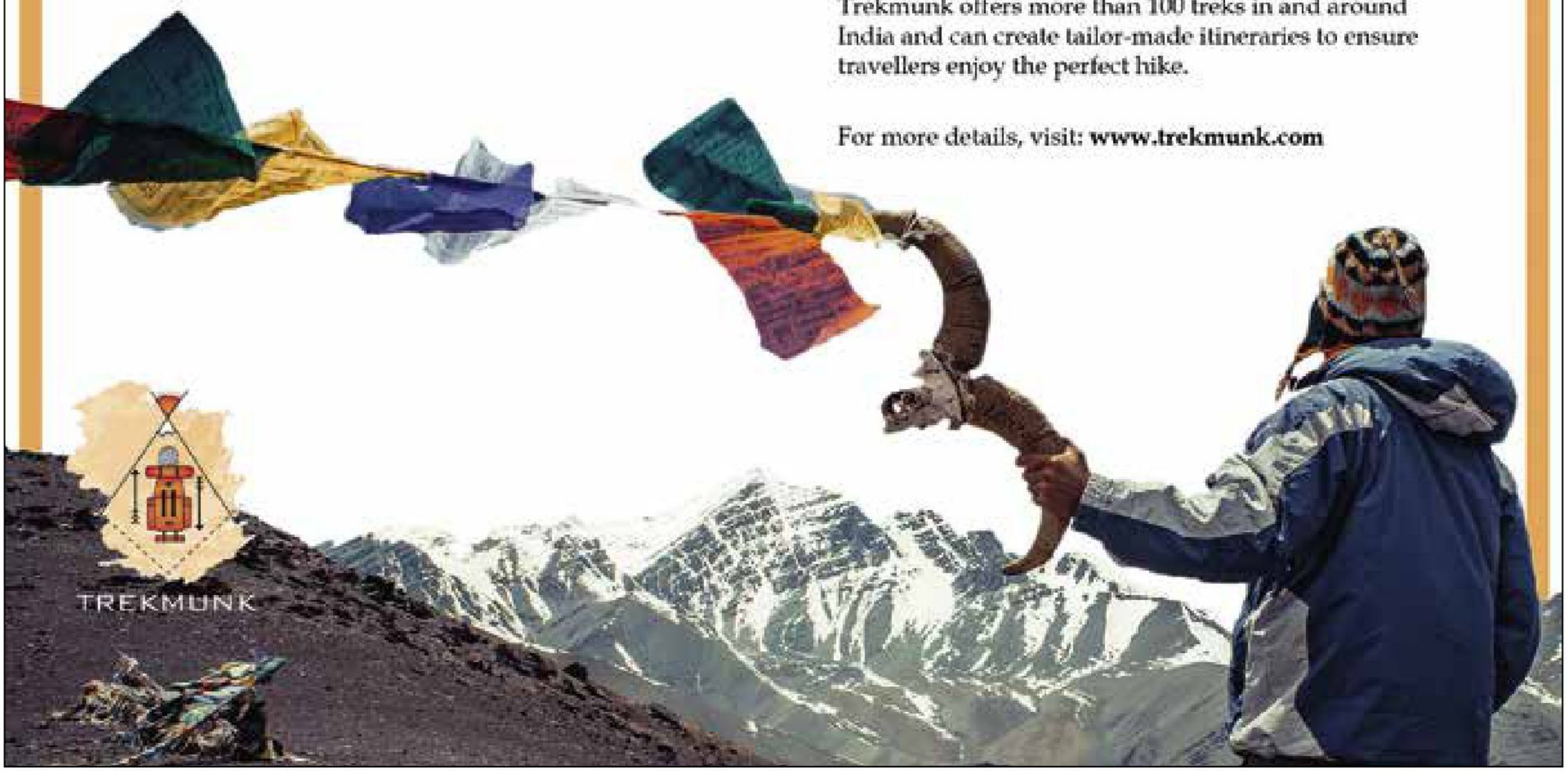
HOW TREKMUNK IS CHANGING TREKKING IN INDIA?

Trekmunk was founded in 2016 by three like-minded friends who wanted to bring a change to the trekking industry. Though the industry is booming, conditions on the Himalayas are declining; fixed camps, plastic pollution and littering are just a few of the problems blighting the beauty of the highest mountain group in the world. Trekmunk focuses on eco-friendly and socially active practices — its treks leave no waste and it has banned single-use plastics from all its operations. Trekmunk offers more than 100 treks in and around India and can create tailor-made itineraries to ensure travellers enjoy the perfect hike.

For more details, visit: **www.trekmunk.com**



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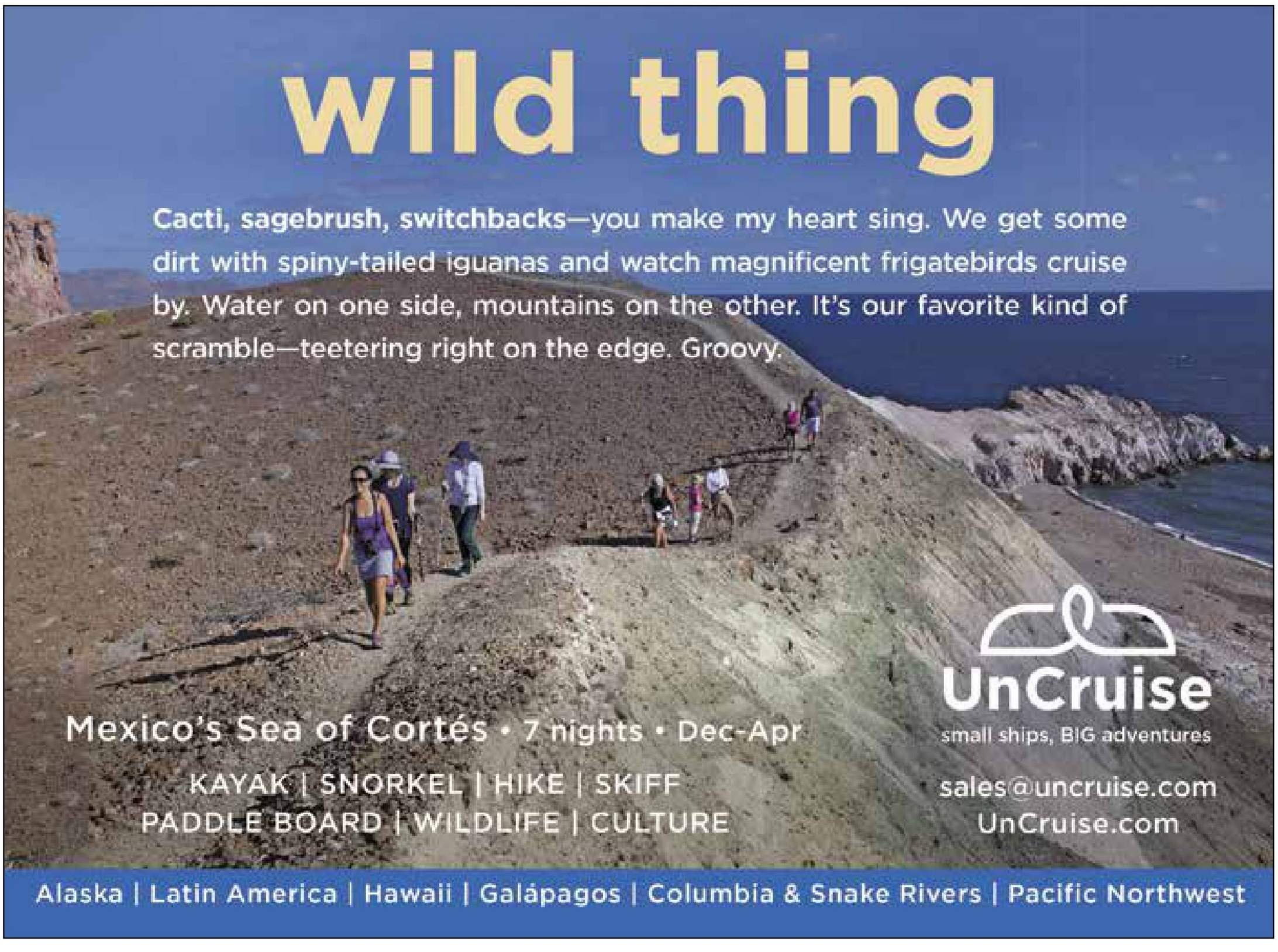
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Artichoke and eel dish at Ricard Camarena Restaurant, Valencia

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Win

Next issue's Star Letter wins a Chrome Industries Summoner backpack!

Worth £170, the Summoner is a distinctive, stylish backpack offering robust protection for travel and urban adventures. It has a 32-litre capacity and is all about easy access on the move, boasting two roomy organiser compartments and a spacious front compartment. *chromeindustries.com*

★ STAR LETTER

Qué rico!

The article in your Jul/Aug issue on the culinary hotpots of Valencia was a superb read — two days after I returned from the city! Its gastronomic delights are many and varied, from creamy, tiger nut-based *horchata* to flame-kissed paellas and *arroces*. Particularly worthy of note is Casa Carmelo, a restaurant located towards the northern end of the Playa de la Malvarrosa that cooks all its paellas and *arroces* over orange wood, which results in a caramelised, crunchy *socarrat* at the bottom of the pan. The restaurant also serves plump, local *clochinas al vapor* (steamed mussels), which also come highly recommended — especially while you're waiting for that rice to caramelise and toast. **MARK SALKELD**

Tales from the desert

The Jordan feature in the Jul/Aug issue is so right about Bedouin culture being at the heart of experiences in this country. During a hike in fiery, red-stoned Wadi Dana — carpeted in spring flowers — our Bedouin guide spoke little English but gestured effectively with his hands. On a break, he made us sweet tea flavoured with artemis leaves. Towards the end of the walk, two little girls followed me shyly. I hope tourism in Jordan continues to maintain the delicate balance between promoting the culture of these proud people and not intruding on their lives. **NANDINI CHARKRABORTY**

Voyage of discovery

To celebrate my 70th birthday, my wife and I visited Majorca — a trip that made me realise how significant travel has been in shaping our lives. I met my wife backpacking as a student in Italy; spent many family holidays on the rain-swept west coast of Ireland; and formed lasting friendships with many fellow travellers across the world. When we returned home to a cold and windswept Irish 'summer', I was delighted to find the 'Trips of a Lifetime' feature (Jul/Aug). It's not the stellar views or the iconic settings that create a trip of a lifetime; rather, it's the experiences we share through travel, the friendships created and the discovery of ourselves. **DAVID VANCE**

Don't miss!

National Geographic has collaborated with Teemill on a range of organic t-shirts. Teemill is an Isle of Wight-based business on a mission to redesign the t-shirt industry to be truly sustainable by using tech. Once worn out, the garments can be posted back to Teemill for free and the company will then recycle them into new T-shirts. View the full range at *nationalgeographic.teemill.com*

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